The Sexual Politics of Cooking: A Feminist Analysis of Culinary Hierarchy in Western Culture

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Abstract It is often assumed that culinary influence has been ‘top down’ – that is, that haute cuisine and professional cooking by male chefs has influenced popular cooking, especially once literacy became commonplace, and particularly with the publication of cookery books directed at the middle-class ‘housewife’. Whilst it is certainly true that professional cooking has influenced domestic cooking as a ‘trickle-down’ effect, there is an area of serious neglect or oversight – namely, the denial or ignoring of the culinary influence in the other direction, that is, the influence of female domestic cooking on haute cuisine.

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A History of Culinary Hierarchy

A culinary hierarchy – that is, the existence of ‘high class’ or aristocratic cuisine and a domestic, everyday “low” cuisine – is not a universal phenomenon; it exists only in certain cultural contexts. British anthropologist, Jack Goody\(^1\) claims that the existence of a culinary hierarchy is a feature of socially stratified societies, that is, societies which have a fairly rigid class or caste system. On the basis of a comparative study of Sub-Saharan Africa (namely, northern Ghana)\(^2\) where a system of culinary hierarchy doesn’t exist and Eurasia (that is Europe, the Middle East, India and China) where it does, he concludes that the two main features that are present in cultures in which an haute cuisine develops are the existence of plough agriculture and literacy.\(^3\) These two are central features of Eurasian societies, but not of Sub-Saharan Africa. Goody claims that the absence of plough agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa where hoe cultivation rather than the plough has been the tradition, meant that the system of surplus production associated with plough agriculture didn’t develop. He states that, consequently, in Sub-Saharan Africa neither a rigid system of social stratification nor a culinary hierarchy developed as it did in Eurasian societies.\(^4\)

The development of settled agriculture which is believed to have first occurred in the ‘fertile crescent’ of Mesopotamia with the advent of the Neolithic Revolution some 8,000 to 10,000 years ago\(^5\) is considered to have been the key historical event which led to the development of stratified societies.\(^6\) The resulting social hierarchy, according to Goody, ultimately led to the development of a
hierarchical culinary system, involving a sexual division of labour. Cross-culturally, cooking is associated with women and the domestic domain of the household,\textsuperscript{7} with in western society cooking having “long been defined as one of women’s major and most important tasks within the home.”\textsuperscript{8} However, a culinary hierarchy is a feature of western society in which a higher status is accorded public professional cooking done usually by male chefs than that accorded to private domestic cooking done by women.

The sexual division of labour – that is the assignment of certain activities on the basis of being either male or female – is a basic characteristic of all human societies, and has been a feature of human life probably since prehistory.\textsuperscript{9} The earliest division of labour, apart from giving birth of children which only women are biologically capable of, was probably that associated with the gathering of food for the communities’ daily subsistence needs.\textsuperscript{10} Evidence strongly suggests that in early hunter-gatherer societies, it was women who provided the bulk of the group’s daily subsistence food needs. It is suggested that women’s role as the main providers and preparers of food arose as a “response to the greater nutritional stress experienced by females during pregnancy, and later in the course of feeding their young through lactation and with foods gathered from the surrounding savannah.”\textsuperscript{11} Women’s central role as providers of the bulk of the group’s food in societies seems to result in a recognition of their importance to the group’s survival, although this does not necessarily translate into high status or equality with males and male activities – for example, in some instances the occasional meat brought back from the hunt by men has a particularly high value attached to it.\textsuperscript{12}

With regard to cooking, Goody claims that a sexual division of labour has existed since the early Egyptian period, where “historical evidence for the emergence of a high and low cuisine first appears”.\textsuperscript{13} He further notes that “the difference between high and low (cuisine) tended to be one between male and female,” with men taking over “the female recipes of daily cooking and transform(ing) them into the haute cuisine of the court.”\textsuperscript{14} He states that since the early Egyptian period “the great courts of Europe and the Mediterranean (have) employed men as cooks.”\textsuperscript{15}

Goody identifies literacy as the second characteristic of socially stratified cultures which encourages the development of a culinary hierarchy. For much of history writing has only been available to a relatively small male elite. This is reflected in the fact that the earliest writing on cooking was written not so much by practicing cooks, but by a male elite of literate gastronomes who were writing for others like themselves.\textsuperscript{16} This literature was not so much about cooking, but about eating.\textsuperscript{17} Probably the earliest exponent of classical Greek
gastronomy was Archestratus who, in the third century BC “travelled the entire world known to the Greeks, documenting the ‘delights of the belly’”. Archestratus’s *The Life of Luxury* is considered to be Europe’s oldest cookery book, although, in the tradition of classical Greek gastronomy, it “was almost certainly not a hands-on cookery-book, but a volume to be enjoyed at a rich man’s banquet and symposium.” Following in this tradition were the famous first-century Athenian gastronome, Athenaeus, and later the Roman, Apicus, the writings of whom were “no guide to ordinary eating, but essentially of gastronomy directed at a ‘favoured few’”.

The emphasis on conspicuous consumption and culinary elaboration was a deliberate attempt to emphasise a social hierarchy and a separation between the lives of the ‘common people’ and a wealthy elite. As Goody says, the emphasis placed “on riches, luxury and difference” itself typified this approach with “its essential elements of conspicuous consumption, of servile labour and of culinary elaboration.” The particular difference being stressed by these well-off male Athenians was that between themselves and women and slaves, whose role it was to provide this ‘servile labour’. These wealthy men, who “cared nought for time or labour” did not have to perform menial labour, but were waited upon and serviced by slaves and prostitutes.

The development of *haute cuisine* has traditionally consisted of the elaboration of regional peasant cuisine with expensive, exotic ingredients, especially spices. Even sugar, such a cheap everyday product now, was a great luxury, and used, in fairly small amounts, along with spices, to season dishes. The dependence on spices and other imported ingredients resulted in the tendency of the court cooking during this time to be fairly standardised. Throughout many centuries of European history, the cooking that was done in the royal kitchens of, for instance, England and Germany was essentially the same as that in the royal and aristocratic kitchens of Italy and France.

Another feature of aristocratic cooking throughout this period, in addition to the lavish and often excessive (certainly to our modern tastes) use of spices, was the extraordinarily high consumption of meat, in contrast to the cooking of the peasantry, which was vegetable and grain based, supplemented by dairy foods and fish (often salted), with only a little meat, usually in dried or preserved form, from the ‘family pig’. As Goody explains, ostentation and high meat consumption “marked the rich from the poor”, and in fact was intended to do so, with the high meat diet of the upper classes being a deliberate display of wealth in order to mark social separation from the poor.

Goody points out that this emphasis on meat as necessary to the idea of what constitutes an adequate diet has led to the “idea of meat...
as the most important element of human diet (being) held by many European historians” and the accompanying assumption that the diet of the peasantry was poor and inadequate. This assumption is, however, occasionally challenged. Jean-Francois Revel, for instance, states that “popular cuisine (was) less poor in quantity and quality . . . than historians ordinarily lead us to believe.” Mennell also notes that, although “most Frenchmen in the nineteenth century ate very different food from what was being concocted in Parisian restaurants, . . . there are numerous accounts of peasants’ talent for making wholesome meals out of scant resources,” and that “many accounts of how peasants ate suggest a certain talent for producing tasty dishes from very little.” This suggests that the cooking of the common people, that is the everyday domestic cooking of women, far from being dull, unimaginative and limited, and consisting of little more than a tasteless watery gruel, as appears to be assumed by many food historians, was in fact both interesting and healthy, making imaginative use of what was locally available.

The relative scarcity of food was in fact a feature of life for many in Europe until quite recently. Speaking of her native Italy, an elderly woman says that “For all the years of this century until the end of WWII scarcity was the norm for many people. Times were difficult and food was not always plentiful.” Despite this scarcity, or maybe even because of it, the domestic women cooks of rural Italy have managed – as have women cooks elsewhere – “to coax intense flavours from the most humble of ingredients: root vegetables, stewing hens, cornmeal, fava beans, little-known innards. These women have divined ways to keep pears, lemons and melons fresh through winter.” It is out of this situation of having to make do with what is available that countless generations of women cooks throughout the centuries have improvised and innovated, with “an amazing panoply of genuine dishes passed from older generation to younger in the course of daily life.” Also, as Tom Stobart reminds us (even though he doesn't specify the sex of the cooks, inevitably they would be female, as professional male cooks, employed by the well-to-do, generally have not had to deal with scarcity):

We should remember, too, that inspired improvisation by cooks in circumstances where only a limited range of ingredients were obtainable led to the invention of some of the world's great dishes.

Despite this inventiveness and creative innovation by domestic women cooks, most historians of food and cooking, both male and female, focus almost exclusively on the ‘great culinary achievements’ of famous male chefs and gastronomes. Even those, such as Symons, that do acknowledge the contribution of women cooks still
focus on the famous male gastronomes, such as Brillat-Savarin. This is partly because the food cooked by the ‘common people’ – that is, the countless generations of women cooks – was usually not recorded in written form, but was passed on orally from one generation of women to the next, that is from grandmother to mother to daughter. The fact that literacy was the preserve of a privileged ruling male elite throughout much of this time means that the only recorded accounts we have of the cooking of the time was of the diet and recipes of the wealthy, with little information on the cooking of the ‘common people’. However, despite the relative paucity of such written records, many contemporary regional dishes have roots in antiquity, which does, I suggest, provide a valuable pointer towards giving us an insight into what the rural peasantry ate.

It is generally contended by writers on the history of cooking that the printing of cookbooks was pivotal to the development of haute cuisine because “the very production of recipes as written texts made them available for replication, testing and improvement within a community of cooks.” However, it is also suggested that, instead of encouraging improvement and innovation, the writing down and recording of recipes may have also resulted in the “identity of a dish and its ingredients . . . becom(ing) more firmly fixed, and the scope for idiosyncratic improvisation diminished . . . (with) the written and printed collection of recipes (possibly) exert(ing) pressures towards conformity and thus to conservatism.” Interestingly, traditional women cooks, even when they could read, often distrusted written recipes, feeling that “the formalisation did away with the personal element.”

The invention of the printed book in the C15th is considered by Mennell to be the ‘cultural watershed’ that marked the end of the Middle Ages, with cookery books being some of the earliest printed books. He says that the advent of the printed cookery book and an increase in the rate of literacy, which occurred particularly amongst previously illiterate craftsmen, facilitated the development of haute cuisine by disseminating “a common repertoire of methods and . . . recipes (amongst) an increasingly literate circle of professional cooks.” This was particularly so in France, with La Varenne’s Le Cuisinier Francais, published in 1651, being the first book to mark a “clear break with medieval food and (to mark) the recognisable beginnings of the modern French (haute) cuisine.” Essentially, what characterised this change was a greatly reduced use of spices so characteristic of medieval aristocratic cooking, and the creation of stocks or bouillon, which, “in the hands of later cooks was to develop into the fonds de cuisine fundamental to the creation of the array of sauces characteristic of classical French cuisine.”

describes how over the next couple of centuries, other chefs, such as La Chappelle and Menon, published their own books, each usually deriding their predecessors and seeking to stamp their name on or to claim for themselves the mantle of being the creators of haute cuisine. This desire for individual fame and fortune was a phenomenon that grew out of an increasing emphasis on individual achievement during the Renaissance, and even more so from the Enlightenment cult of the individual which displaced the less individualistic and more collective way of thinking of the Middle Ages. As a result, the pursuit of individual fame and the cultivation of cuisine as fashion became a strong feature of haute cuisine.

The development of cooking as a (male) profession was accompanied by a deliberate distancing by male chefs of their profession from the everyday domestic cooking of women. This separation or differentiation became especially marked with the development of French haute cuisine, so that by the nineteenth century “French professional chefs were at pains to differentiate their work from mere (my italics) domestic cookery.” Even in England, where there was a less marked hierarchy between male and female cooks, men were employed as cooks in upper-class households. In England, cooks of both sexes had a relatively low status, unless the male cook employed was French or at least French trained. Whilst it was considered that “women make far the best English cooks”, French-trained male cooks were generally preferred because it was believed that “however accomplished female cooks may have been, they were considered inferior in talent and knowledge to men.”

One of the reasons that French-trained cooks were inevitably male is expressed in the patronising remark of nineteenth-century Frenchman, Chatillon-Plessis, who claimed it a ‘false economy’ to employ a woman cook rather than a male chef because a “woman cook can never give a table the attractive style that a male chef can bring to it . . .”, and only a male chef has “the elements of ingenuity which a woman will never know how to carry off . . .”。 Despite such attitudes, during the second half of the C19th in France large numbers of women were employed as cooks in middle-class households, as well as some “in the kitchens of the smaller and less-celebrated restaurants.” Mennell writes that this trend alarmed French male chefs who were determined “to emphasise the distance between their own grande cuisine and the ordinary cooking associated with women cooks and housewives”. This attitude was encapsulated by the policy of the exclusively male union of chefs “not (to) abstain from giving recipes for simple family dinners, but without descending to what is called la petite cuisine or domestic cookery.”
Unfortunately, such chauvinism doesn’t belong only to a bygone age. Famous contemporary French chef, Paul Bocuse, whilst praising the cooking of his mother, added that, nevertheless, “like women generally, she lacked the imagination essential to genuine creativity.”53 ‘International superstar’ Bocuse, who is credited (and indeed credits himself) with being the creator of haute cuisine lyonnaise, in fact trained with la mere Brazier, one of the renowned women cooks and small restaurateurs of Lyons, known as les meres lyonnaises54 and also with Ferdinand Point, who, having himself learnt how to cook from his mother, la mere Point, is credited with the ‘lightening up’ of haute cuisine following the Second World War.55 Nevertheless, despite this heritage of woman cooks, including his mother, he dedicates his cookbook The Cuisine of Paul Bocuse (originally published in 1978 as The New Cuisine) to his father and “in tribute to Alfred Guerot and Ferdinand Point, who inspired La Nouvelle Cuisine Francaise”.56 Bocuse is typical of many celebrated male chefs. Having learnt their art from their mothers or grandmothers, who are either very good domestic cooks or cooks in small restaurants or bistros, they then draw upon the traditional recipes of these women, without giving due acknowledgement, often elaborating on these recipes in order to claim them as their own,57 for which they then become famous and often wealthy. This ego-driven, competitive ambition on the part of many male chefs to obtain fame, a fame usually associated with their ‘invention’ of ‘new and original’ recipes, which in fact are often derived from their mother’s or other women’s domestic recipes, contrasts sharply with the tradition of female cooks, such as that described by Louisa Jones who, speaking of the age-old collective knowledge of women cooks in the south of France, says:

Such traditions, such techniques, all depend upon a tight network of women, a strong solidarity from place to place and from generation to generation. Asked about her almond tart, Madame Eysette (who cooks in her own small restaurant) would not dream of presenting it as an original creation, but proudly says she got the recipe from Madame Colomb, down the road.58

A classical example of the appropriation of female domestic cooking, which has been the basis of haute or aristocratic cuisine since the time of the pharaohs, is described by the famous English food writer, Elizabeth David (although she doesn’t go so far as to call it ‘appropriation’). David describes how Auguste Escoffier, perhaps the most celebrated of all French chefs, nostalgically turned to the traditional Provencal peasant dishes prepared by his mother in his childhood, taking one – potatoes and artichoke hearts, cooked with olive oil, garlic and thyme – and refining it for the gourmet public of Paris by substituting expensive truffles for the garlic and butter for
the olive oil. In a further elaboration, he also added a gigot of lamb – a dish that for his mother would have been a simple roast on a bed of potatoes prepared for a special occasion or a festival – thereby combining and elaborating two ancient and traditional Provencal peasant dishes, naming his ‘creation’ carre d’agneau Mistral, in honour of the Provencal poet of that name, Frederic Mistral. David succinctly states that “He publishes the recipe in a book; and another of the myriad village dishes of France has entered the repertory of la cuisine classique.” She also adds, rather wryly, that “A poor Provencal family might find their great son’s version of a familiar dish lacking in savour . . .”, preferring in fact the robust rustic original to Escoffier’s refined version of it.59

Since the 1970’s French haute cuisine has undergone a ‘revolution’, with “extravagance no longer (being) considered proof of ‘artistry’.”60 What is characteristic of the new haute cuisine’s rejection of its previously rich elaboration, is that, after decades of “being intent on distancing itself from its family and peasant roots”, it is now self-consciously turning towards those very roots, that is, towards traditional ‘grandmother’s cooking’ or la cuisine des femmes.61 The characteristics of this cuisine des femmes is that it is seasonally based, using fresh local produce economically and imaginatively, a product of women’s traditional need to be frugal and, in cooking for their families, having to make the best of whatever is available. As Jones explains, many young male chefs are now wanting to emulate the ‘love and generosity’ of women’s cooking. However, unlike these women who “have worked long hours, giving unstintingly of their time and energy, out of devotion to their families” and who “have generally remained unsung”,62 these young male chefs, even though they may be devoted to their work, also want fame and money. Unlike women, they are not prepared to do it just for love, either of family or for what they are doing.

It was the traditional regional cooking of women, especially that of les meres lyonnaises, which was largely responsible for the ‘culinary revolution’, of the 1970’s63 – that is, the simplifying and lightening up of the rich and over-elaborate haute cuisine which had been developed by the male chefs of France over several centuries. However, this culinary transformation was ‘mediated’ by men.64 The assumption that the cooking of women needs to be ‘mediated’ by male chefs in order to raise it to the level of art, that is of ‘high culture’, permeates the thinking of most culinary historians of cooking. Revel, for instance, whilst stating that it is a mistake that, in order to be considered good, cooking has to complicated and elaborate, nevertheless insists that cooking can only be raised to the level of ‘art’ when a (presumably male) chef transposes the ingredients “into a new register, where they disappear only to be
reborn as a whole that owes its existence to (his sic) intelligence."\(^65\) Revel is, however, very critical of *haute cuisine*’s tendency to be too elaborate, stating that such “cooks ruin cuisine; they are the plague of modern gastronomy.”\(^66\) He stresses that, in order to avoid the risk of over-elaboration, practitioners of *haute cuisine* need to turn at regular intervals to traditional ‘popular’ (that is, female domestic) cooking for inspiration. Nevertheless, he also states that at the same time “reformers of gastronomy . . . must know how to react against family cuisine, which clings to its errors as to its qualities.”\(^67\) What Revel is saying in effect is that the everyday domestic cooking of women, for all its good qualities, nevertheless requires the inspiration and guiding hand of the ‘erudite’ male gastronome or chef to transpose it into ‘art’ and to elevate it to the status of ‘great cuisine’. Revel’s attitude exemplifies, I would suggest, the nature/culture dualism which lies at the heart of western male supremacist thinking – a patriarchal mindset that aligns men with culture and reason and women with nature and irrationality. According to this thinking, when cooking is done by women it is seen as a ‘natural’ and unconscious extension of their biological capacity to nurture their young, namely breastfeeding; by contrast, when cooking is done by men it is seen as a manifestation of reason and consciousness, and therefore as an expression of culture.

**Cooking and the Nature/Culture Divide**

The alignment of women with nature and men with culture has ancient origins in western culture. Whether such a dualism has always existed or is universal is debatable. Sherry Ortner in her famous essay on the subject contends that anthropological evidence suggests that the nature/culture divide, is a universal phenomenon, although “some cultures articulate a much stronger opposition between the two categories than others”.\(^68\) The nature/culture divide, which, Ortner stresses, is a product itself of culture, aligns men with culture and women with nature. This dualism is accompanied by a devaluation of women and by men’s domination of them, although, she states, this varies in degree and the way it is expressed in different cultures.\(^69\) However, there isn’t unanimous agreement amongst anthropologists regarding Ortner’s thesis on the universality of the nature/culture divide and women’s resulting subordination. Eleanor Leacock for instance argues that societies do exist where there is equality between the sexes, and that the assumption of the “universality of male dominance and the cultural devaluation of women” is not supported by “ethnohistorical materials.”\(^70\) Whilst it is not the purpose, nor within the scope of this article to engage in the debate on the universality or otherwise of
the nature/culture divide – and the accompanying existence of men’s domination of women – certainly, within the western cultural context such a divide or duality has existed since recorded history. And, I suggest that in western culture – as well as certain other cultures, namely those of Eurasia, as noted by Goody – one of the ways this is expressed is in the existence of a culinary hierarchy, involving the alignment of low status domestic cooking with women and high status *haute cuisine* with men.

Val Plumwood suggests that the origins of dualism are probably ancient, although she states that, given the fact that they are inseparable from the “development of institutionalised power”, an understanding of the existence of such human relations in prehistory would “necessarily be speculative.”

Nevertheless, she does suggest that some of the earliest dualisms may have been those of sacred/profane, male/female and master/slave. The association of female with the profane and of male with the sacred may indeed explain why it was that in Ancient Egypt, where the Pharaohs were considered incarnations of the divine, and where “historical evidence for the emergence of a high and low cuisine first appears”, it was men who performed the cooking of the royal court. As Elisabeth L’Orange Furst says, this is supported by the fact that “in primitive societies, men’s legitimate participation in cooking was connected to religion and rituals. To prepare food to be sacrificed to the gods has always been the task of men.”

The dualism that equates women with nature and men with culture in western thought systems essentially has its basis in the biological physiological differences between men and women. Women’s reproductive capacity is seen to align them with nature – matter, the unconscious and instinctive – whilst men are aligned with culture – with reason, rationality and the conscious mind. Feminist theorists point out that differences per se are not the problem, but rather the dualism which is attached to difference. The biological differences between men and women, namely the reproductive organs, are not inherently value-laden, but the dualism that is based on these differences is. Dualisms are a culturally constructed way of justifying and enforcing inequality between the sexes. Therefore, the alignment of women with nature on the basis of their reproductive capacity is not value-free or neutral, but places women on a lower rung of the social ladder compared to men. Even those cultures which have much greater respect for nature than modern industrialised western culture does, still consider human activities that mark a distinction of humans from nature to be superior to nature – and invariably these ‘higher’ human activities that are seen to constitute culture as distinct from nature are attributed to or aligned with men rather than women. This has prompted Margaret Mead to observe that:
In every known society, the male’s need for achievement can be recognised. Men may cook, or weave, or dress dolls or hunt hummingbirds, but if such activities are appropriate occupations of men, then the whole society, men and women alike, votes them as important. When the same occupations are performed by women they are regarded as less important.\(^\text{76}\)

This statement, I suggest, highlights the fact that the nature/culture divide results in a higher social value and status being accorded an activity when it is performed by men rather than by women, even when it is an activity that is usually performed by women, such as cooking.\(^\text{77}\) As Mead points out, this is when society deems such activities as appropriate to men. Not all cultures consider cooking to be an appropriate male activity – for instance, Elisabeth L’Orange Furst points out that in much of Africa “To cook would threaten a man’s masculinity” with cooking being “defined explicitly as a woman’s work to such an extent” that in one African society “men were looked upon as transvestites if they used the cooking pots.”\(^\text{78}\) However, in other cultures – typically those of Eurasia – although everyday private domestic cooking is considered to be almost exclusively a female activity, professional cooking, especially the cooking associated with haute cuisine has historically been a male occupation, with an accompanying high status placed on it compared with women’s domestic cooking. The subject of cooking in fact provides, I would suggest, a particularly striking example of how an activity that is normally associated with women takes on a higher social value when done by men. Ortner remarks on this phenomenon with regard to cooking:

In the overwhelming majority of societies cooking is the woman’s work... Yet, it is also interesting to note than when a culture (e.g. France or China) develops a tradition of haute cuisine – ‘real’ cooking, as opposed to trivial ordinary domestic cooking – the high chefs are almost always men.\(^\text{79}\)

A two-tiered culinary hierarchy has existed for a long time in European tradition, reaching its apotheosis in the development of French haute cuisine. In western society the nature/culture divide which aligns women with matter and nature and men with reason and the intellect and culture has, I would suggest, led to a deeply engrained cultural belief held by both men and women, that when cooking is done by men it is elevated to a level separate and distinct from and, above all, superior to that done by women.

Despite the fact that in popular thinking, the everyday domestic cooking of women is generally not highly esteemed or considered of high cultural value, it is considered by many anthropologists that the uniquely human ability of cooking is the hallmark of human civilisation. French anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss considered
the discovery of cooking – that is the conversion of raw material into cooked food with the use of fire – to be the pivotal activity that defined human civilisation.\textsuperscript{80} Other theorists too have since asserted this, with the discovery of cooking being “the decisive factor in leading man from a primarily animal existence into one which is fully human.”\textsuperscript{81} The “exclusively and universally human skill”\textsuperscript{82} of control of fire which made cooking possible is believed to have existed at least 400,000 years ago.\textsuperscript{83} According to many anthropologists, historians and archaeologists, the evidence points to the probability that it was women who first discovered or invented cooking. Johan Goudsblom states that cooking, which was “largely the work of women” would in the early stages of human development, have led to “social co-ordination and individual discipline … with useful spin-off effects as well.”\textsuperscript{84} Nevertheless, masculinist scholarship\textsuperscript{85} claims cooking was probably discovered by male hunters who discovered that meat accidentally cooked by a fire started naturally, perhaps by lightning, tasted better and lasted longer than in the raw state, and from this invented the means to make this happen deliberately. In fact, the conventional masculinist idea that pre-agricultural diets were largely meat-based, with most of the food being provided by bands of male hunters, has now been largely discredited. Several writers\textsuperscript{86} conclude that, with the bulk of the diet being plant-based, and with women being the principal providers of especially plant foods in hunter-gatherer societies, it was they who invented or developed the first technology associated with preparing, processing and storing food, including the controlled use of fire. Evelyn Reed, for instance, states that since the earliest times fire has been associated with women, reflected in the many myths that associate women, often in the form of female deities, with fire and the hearth.\textsuperscript{87}

Feminist researcher of early human technology, Autumn Stanley, claims that women were responsible for developing the first technology for both agriculture and cooking. She asserts that:

No one seriously disputes the overwhelming division-of-labor evidence that women invented cooking … (with) women’s clever inventions of soapstone griddles and pots, of waterproof cooking baskets and the use of hot stones to boil mush or liquids … (being) the high technology of their day.\textsuperscript{88}

Although statements about prehistory are to a certain extent necessarily speculative, it seems probable, given women’s central role in food-gathering societies, providing up to 80\% of the food – which is how all human beings lived until the advent of the Neolithic agricultural revolution about 10,000 years ago – that it was in fact women who were responsible for developing the early technology.
associated with the processing and preparation of food, including the systematic use of fire.\textsuperscript{89} Given the centrality of this technology to the creation of human culture, it therefore seems likely that women played a primary role in the development of human culture itself.

Feminists have critiqued the male-centred view of history which has credited ‘man the hunter’ with having the major role in early human development and the creation of human culture. Adrienne Zihlman considers that the androcentric “obsession with hunting has long prevented anthropologists from taking a good look at the probable role of women in shaping the human adaptation.”\textsuperscript{90} Sandra Harding says the androcentric hypothesis that posits that ‘man-the-hunter’ is responsible for the development of tools, and for the socialisation of humans, based on the supposedly co-operative behaviour needed for hunting in groups, “presents men as the sole creators of the shift from prehuman to human cultures.”\textsuperscript{91} In contrast, she says, a gynocentric analysis of the origins of human culture portrays:

females as innovators who contributed more than males to the development of such allegedly human characteristics such as greater intelligence and flexibility. Women are said to have invented the use of tools to defend against predators while gathering and to have fashioned objects to serve in digging, carrying and food preparation.\textsuperscript{92}

According to Maria Mies, the “male self-perception as human, that is as being productive, is closely linked to the invention of tools, and the control of technology.” She adds that “without tools man is no MAN.”\textsuperscript{93} Through the use of tools, men conceive of themselves as consciously acting on and shaping their environment. Mies states that it is the masculinist perception of female productivity, especially the production of life, as passive and unconscious, rather than as conscious social activity, that equates women with nature. Men on the other hand, perceive themselves as consciously acting on and shaping their environment. Therefore, unlike women, men are perceived as being fully human, as the creators and shapers of culture, separate from and above nature, and, by extension, women. Mies points out that human beings, both male and female, necessarily interact with nature via their bodies, but that this interaction is qualitatively different for men and women. She argues that women’s ability to give birth, plus their connected role as the principal providers and preparers of food, including the first technology associated with it, means that it was women, rather than men, who “developed the first truly productive relationship with nature”.\textsuperscript{94}

With regard to cooking, the masculinist thinking that considers only men to be capable of rational conscious thought and creativity
is expressed, I would suggest, by Revel's contention that only haute cuisine “is capable of creating the creative principle behind this or that knack of preparing a dish and of applying consciously what was executed unconsciously and mechanically.”95 This sort of mystification on the part of male gastronomes is an attempt to elevate men above the satisfying of ‘base animal-hunger’ with which women’s daily domestic cooking is associated. The view of physical needs, such as hunger, as being animal-like and therefore less than human permeates the thinking of western culture. As Carol MacMillan states, the “view that what makes any activity specifically human is the fact that absolutely no parallel for it exists in the animal world”96 formed the basis of Greek political thought as espoused by Aristotle, and reiterated by Enlightenment philosophers, such as Hegel and Kant. This male supremacist thinking has been much critiqued by feminists, especially ecofeminists,97 for its denial of a human connection to nature and to animals. This masculinist mindset also aligns women’s biological role in procreation and the suckling of babies with the ‘instinctual’ life of animals; women’s domestic cooking is seen to be simply an extension of this essentially ‘animal-like’ feeding or nurturing role. However, neither human reproduction nor eating is purely or merely instinctual; both are conscious social activities. Although the satisfaction of hunger is a basic need of both human beings and animals, as MacMillan points out, “the satisfaction of hunger is not the same for human beings as it is for animals”.98 For human beings, food and eating are invested with complex emotional, psychological and cultural meanings. MacMillan states that:

if we take note of the complicated surroundings in which most human activities occur, 

... A woman baking bread ... distinguishes herself from an animal as clearly as does a philosopher cogitating in isolation.99

By crediting themselves as the creators of human culture, men have also claimed for themselves the credit for being the creators of that most crucially ‘civilising’ of human activities, cooking. This is despite the fact that women are, and, as far as we know always have been, the primary preparers of food in all human societies. I am not suggesting that the creation of a culinary hierarchy has necessarily been a conscious conspiracy on the part of men to appropriate female creativity. Rather, what is more likely is the fact that, because of the deeply imbued thinking in male supremacist culture that equates men with culture, any activity when done by men, including that which is normally done by women, such as cooking, is automatically elevated to a higher cultural level. This activity then in turn becomes a self-perpetuating, exclusively male one. As Ortner notes:
Women perform lower-level conversions from nature to culture, but when the culture distinguishes a higher level of the same functions, the higher level is restricted to men.\textsuperscript{100}

However, if women are indeed responsible for the ‘invention’ of cooking as the evidence seems to suggest, then it could be argued that, far from being separate or one step removed from culture, as masculinist thinking asserts, women are in fact central to and instrumental in the creation of culture. Ortner suggests that, on the basis of their role in both the socialising of children – “the transform(ing of) infants from mere organisms into cultured humans” – and the transforming of ‘raw nature’ into cooked food, women could not be more “representative of culture.”\textsuperscript{101} She states that:

If it is true, as Levi-Strauss has argued (1969b), that transforming the raw into the cooked may represent, in many systems of thought, the transition from nature to culture, then here we have women aligned with this important culturizing process, which could easily place her in the category of culture, triumphing over nature . . . and her socializing and cooking functions within the domestic context show her to be a powerful agent of the cultural process, constantly transforming raw materials into cultural products.\textsuperscript{102}

Female domestic cooking is based on collective and shared knowledge, evolving over many generations, with experience and knowledge passed on from grandmother and mother to daughter, forming rich regional communal culinary traditions.\textsuperscript{103} If as Goudsblom states, culture is “now generally accepted in the social sciences as the technical term for referring to all those aspects of behaviour that are ‘learned, shared and transmitted’”,\textsuperscript{104} then certainly what women do in the daily round and routine of domestic cooking and in the socialisation of children is ‘culture’. However, it is the very everydayness of women’s domestic cooking that causes it to be overlooked and not counted as culture. The largely non-individualistic, collective tradition of women’s cooking is generally dismissed by male intellectuals, who consider that only the ‘exceptional and the extraordinary’ constitute culture.\textsuperscript{105} This attitude is expressed by Revel when he claims that domestic cooking is a “closed cuisine originating in a parochial regional spirit . . . whose duty it is to preserve what the centuries have produced for better or worse”, whereas haute or grande cuisine is “open” and “fated to create”\textsuperscript{106} and, most importantly, “ceases to be collective.”\textsuperscript{107}

This statement, I suggest, epitomises the denial or trivialisation of women’s culinary creativity and innovation. Acknowledging the dismissal of women’s culinary achievements, Michael Symons notes that:
Cooks have always been in the background – both ever-present and unnoticed. Their contributions have seemed too common, pervasive, trivial, unproblematic. Cooks generally have been women, and their achievements overlooked as inglorious and private.108

Yet, despite having been relegated to the background, women’s culinary creativity and inspiration has been drawn upon, and appropriated by male professional chefs in the creation of a culinary hierarchy. At the same time they have sought to distance themselves from women’s domestic cooking, whilst denying their appropriation of and dependence on it. This, I would suggest, vividly illustrates what Plumwood calls ‘backgrounding denial’ which she defines as “mak(ing) use of the other, organising, relying on and benefiting from the other’s services”, . . . whilst “deny(ing) the dependency this creates.” She says that one of the most common ways this is done is by “denying the importance of the other’s contribution”, and “one way to do this is to insist on a strong hierarchy of activities, so that the denied areas are simply not ‘worth’ noting.”109 At the same time, as feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye explains, “the master’s perspective” requires both denial of his dependency on women, and a denial and negation of women’s reality because:

It is essential to the maintenance of the foreground (phallocratic) reality that nothing within it refer in any way to anything in the background, and yet it depends absolutely on the existence of the background.110

This, I would argue, is precisely the dynamic underlying the existence of a culinary hierarchy: women’s domestic cooking is ignored or trivialised. Yet at the same time, haute cuisine depends upon it for its existence, by drawing upon and appropriating this area of female creativity for its own ends. To ensure a separation and a denial of this dependency a rigid hierarchy is created, which disowns any connection or debt to women’s creativity. Symons points out that it is the very everydayness, routine and repetition of domestic cooking that causes it to be overlooked and dismissed. He says, however, that in fact it is precisely:

through repetition, routine, reiteration, recapitulation, rigmarole, ritual, rhythm, regulation, reproduction – recipes (that) culture gains its force, (and) while each of the cooks’s actions might be infinitesimal, the results have multiplied into civilisation.111

Nevertheless, it is these very qualities of “dailiness, necessity and particularity” which are devalued in western patriarchal culture. This is because, as Plumwood says, they are the qualities which, along with emotionality, are “supposedly exemplified in and constitutive of femininity and the private sphere.”112 The alignment of women with the private, domestic sphere and men with the public
arena is a central feature of western patriarchal culture. This public/private split is manifested especially in the sexual division of labour and the different value placed on activities performed by each sex.

**Cooking and the Sexual Division of Labour**

Although the public/private split is not unique to ‘advanced capitalist’ societies, it does tend to be particularly marked in societies which are hierarchically structured such as those of western society. In western culture, there is a strong division between the public and private spheres which has resulted in a particularly sharp distinction between the public high status activities of men and the private low status activities of women. What is of interest to feminists is not so much the existence of a system of sexual division of labour, but the fact that in most cultures a different value is placed on activities according to the sex performing them, with generally a higher value given to those performed by men than to those performed by women. As Maria Mies points out, when we talk of a sexual division of labour, what is of concern to feminism, is not so much when a sexual division of labour arose between men and women, because such a division “is a necessary consequence of all human interaction with nature”. Rather what matters is how this division of labour became an “asymmetric and hierarchical” relationship of “dominance and exploitation”.

Two characteristics that are strongly associated with the public/private split is the distinction between activities that are considered of ‘use-value’ and those of ‘exchange-value’. From the time of Aristotle, in western culture women’s labour has been seen as not adding value. This view has prevailed to a greater or lesser extent ever since, although the thinking that emerged from the Enlightenment period – expressed by theorists such as Locke, Hegel and Rousseau – and from the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions reinforced and accentuated the public/private split and the accompanying devaluation of women. The division between ‘use-value’ and ‘exchange-value’ is one in which only that which is exchanged, as a commodity usually for money in the public sphere, is considered to have real value – that is, to have ‘exchange’ or ‘market’ value.

The unpaid domestic work done by women – childcare, cleaning, cooking, etc. – is usually referred to as ‘reproductive’ labour as distinct from ‘productive’ labour. Domestic activities, such as childcare and cooking, are termed ‘reproductive’ because they are to do with reproducing “through housework, the social relations within the family.” Reproductive labour is seen to have no exchange
or market value.\textsuperscript{117} Therefore, women's unpaid domestic work, including cooking, which is done within the private sphere is seen to have no such value. In contrast, cooking done outside the home in a professional capacity, even if identical to that done within the home, is considered productive because it is paid for and is therefore considered to have exchange or market value. This is reflected in the fact that, unlike private domestic cooking, it is counted in national accounting systems.\textsuperscript{118}

It could be argued that the application of 'use-value' to private domestic cooking is not gender-specific, and, in theory, would apply whether that cooking was done by either a man or a woman, and that, conversely, paid cooking outside the home can be, and, in fact, is done by both men and women. The non-recognition of domestic cooking as not being necessarily sex-specific is expressed by Symons, who states that domestic cooks “are downgraded not because they are women, but because they remain domestics.”\textsuperscript{119} However, this ignores the reality that, although it is the private domestic nature of women’s everyday cooking that renders it lacking in economic or market value, it is “women as economic agents who are excluded from the (exchange) market, not what they produce.”\textsuperscript{120}

It is therefore not cooking per se (or indeed any other activity normally done within the home, such as cleaning or childcare) that is excluded from the market, because the same work when done outside the home is paid. As Donna Dickenson argues, “Housework is excluded from market relations because it is done by women, not because it is inherently not a source of market value, or because it could not be exchanged for money.”\textsuperscript{121} Therefore, domestic cooking is ‘downgraded’ precisely because it is done by women, with the domestic being synonymous with women.

French sociologist, Christine Delphy is critical of the distinction between 'use-value' and 'exchange-value' which she contends takes the dominant “viewpoint of the market.”\textsuperscript{122} She prefers instead to describe housework as “production for self-consumption” rather than 'reproduction'.\textsuperscript{123} Based on her study of rural families in France, Delphy concludes that the opposition between ‘use-values’ and ‘exchange values’ is a false one when viewed from the point of view of what she terms the ‘domestic mode of production.’\textsuperscript{124} To illustrate this, she describes how in the “traditional peasant farm economy, the family produces a large part of the goods which it consumes.”\textsuperscript{125} These are goods and services which, if the family didn’t produce them, would have to be purchased from outside the household. She states, therefore, that with the produce consumed by the family having both ‘use’ and ‘exchange’ value, there is no distinction between the two.\textsuperscript{126}

The domestic nature of women’s work is not innate or due to women’s biology, even though it is generally assumed by most male
theorists, including Marx, that the sexual division of labour which equates women with the domestic sphere is biologically based and hence in some sense ‘natural’. Marx, for instance, assumed that “reproduction simply is women’s domain, ... (so that) there is something natural and inherently non-exploitative about the division of labour within the family.” Nevertheless, feminist analysis refutes this masculinist conclusion, pointing out that the only aspect of the sexual division of labour that is a biological given is the birth of children. Beyond the biological fact that only women are capable of giving birth and breast-feeding, all other human activities that are assigned on the basis of sex are social or cultural in nature. Nancy Hartstock points out that “the fact that women and not men bear children is not (yet) a social choice, but that women and not men rear children in a society structured by compulsory heterosexuality and male dominance is clearly a societal choice.” Marilyn Waring also points out that it is through the institutions of compulsory heterosexuality and marriage that the “social relations of reproduction are relations of dominance.”

According to Marxist thought, the alienation of a worker’s labour occurs under oppressive conditions of exploitative employment relations, especially those of feudalism and capitalism. Whilst Dickenson acknowledges that Marx and Engels considered there to be “nothing intrinsically degrading about childbearing, childrearing and household labour”, agreeing that “arguably, domestic work even satisfies human need far more directly than does production for profit”, she, along with many other feminists, are critical of Marx’s definition of alienation, which they say does not include or is not applicable to women’s domestic labour. Dickenson, for instance, states that “Marx’s own definition of alienation specifically does not apply to women’s domestic or ‘reproductive’ labour.” She says that the gender-blind view of western masculinist thinking of Marx and of his predecessors, Locke and Hegel, that ‘even the person who has non-physical property (still) owns one inalienable asset – labour power”’, is based on the “Lockean assumption that ‘every man hath a property in his person’”. This, she claims, does not hold true for women. Feminists also point out the inadequacy of the Marxist solution to women’s exploitation and subordination being in paid, ‘productive’ work outside the home, because – apart from adding to women’s already heavy workload, and given men’s lack of participation in domestic labour – “paid employment does not give the wife ownership of her own labour.”

Women’s alienation from their labour – what Dickenson calls women’s lack of property in their own labour – is caused, according to both Delphy and Dickenson, by marriage. Delphy and Dickenson identify marriage as the key institution by which women’s labour is
appropriated by men. According to Delphy, “marriage is the institution by which unpaid work is extorted from a particular category of the population, women-wives” with the “valuelessness of domestic work performed by married women deriv(ing) institutionally from the marriage contract.” Dickenson contends that the problem for women with regard to marriage is not so much that it is a contract, but a sexual contract, with very unequal terms for women. Maureen Mackintosh also considers that “A woman is not in control of her work within the home . . . since she does that work within an institution (i.e. marriage) in which she is subordinated.” It is within the institution of marriage that a woman’s labour is appropriated by her husband for the maintenance of his physical and emotional needs, “replenishing the labour power of her exhausted husband” so that he is enabled to operate in the public sphere, doing paid, ‘productive’ work.

Essentially, the unpaid work of women within the domestic domain – the physical and emotional care-taking of the family that is the basis of housework, of which the preparation of food is such an important part – frees men from having to deal with the basic emotional and physical necessities of life. This allows them to devote their time and energy to selling their labour in the market, pursuing paid ‘productive’ work. Sandra Harding notes that, in fact, the more successfully women perform this nurturing and life-sustaining work, “the more invisible does their work become to men.” This is because men are “relieved of the need to maintain their own bodies . . . (and) see as real only what corresponds to their abstracted mental world.” She states that “like Hegel’s master, to whom the slave’s labour appears merely as an extension of his own being and will, men see women’s work not as real work – self-chosen and consciously willed – but only as ‘natural’ activity, as instinctual or emotional labours of love.” I would suggest that this helps explain why women’s domestic cooking remains invisible, in contrast to the public professional cooking of men, which is often met with acclaim and financial reward.

It may be argued that the above only applies to married women because single women do not have their domestic labour appropriated by a husband and are therefore not alienated from their labour in the way that married women are. However, the status of married women is the social norm, and in a society where the institution of compulsory heterosexuality assumes that sooner or later all or nearly all women will marry, this impacts on all women, married or not. Delphy points out that marriage is still seen as offering women “the best career, economically speaking”. This has implications for women’s paid work outside the home, whether they are married or single; the assumption that women will eventually be
supported by a husband’s career, results in men’s salaries being generally much higher than for women employed outside the home, whether they married or not. This situation, I would suggest, accounts at least in part for the fact that even when women do work commensurate with men outside the home, including professional cooking, it tends to be accorded a lower status and value than when done by men.

It might be supposed that the situation I have examined in this paper is changing: that because there are now more women chefs working in restaurants and more men involved in at least some domestic cooking that the dichotomy discussed above is breaking down. I would suggest however, that, although superficially things may appear to be changing, the fundamentals in fact are still firmly in place. For instance, Ann Cooper, in lamenting the lack of esteem and respect that is given to women with regard to food preparation, believes that if more women enter the ranks of professional cooking this will change. However, even though more women are entering the public realm as professional chefs and are indeed sometimes celebrated for their achievements, they very rarely become a ‘big name’ in the way that male chefs do – and are certainly never credited with being the creators of a cuisine the way Paul Bocuse is. Also, male-headed restaurant kitchens are very often hierarchical and competitive bastions of macho and misogynist language and behaviour and are therefore hostile and oppressive work environments for women. And, despite a long tradition of female chefs and restaurateurs in France, the culinary hierarchy is particularly entrenched there, as I have described earlier in this article.

Does the fact that more men are doing some cooking at home represent a change? I would also suggest not fundamentally. Whilst it is true that more men are involved in domestic cooking, they do so because they choose to, in contrast to women who have to, whether they want to or not. For some women cooking meals for possibly unappreciative families may (understandably) be viewed as drudgery, whilst for others domestic cooking can be a source of enjoyment and creative satisfaction. Lois Bryson reports, for instance, that although women find many household tasks unpleasant, “aspects of meal preparation and childcare (are) enjoyed.” Significantly, it is precisely aspects of these two potentially satisfying and creative activities that men do when they choose to involve themselves in housework. Men who do cook at home often choose to do so because, unlike most other domestic work such as cleaning and ironing, it involves creativity and hence is potentially satisfying and rewarding. Susan Maushart states that for men who have the freedom to choose to cook a four course gourmet
dinner party if they wish, it is fun, ‘a performance’ for which they usually gain much praise; in contrast, the daily grind of ‘frying sausages and mashing potatoes’ – what she calls ‘wifework’ – “can stress you out of your skull”. American sociologist, Marjorie De Vault also finds that very few men actually do the day-to-day cooking for their families, what she calls being involved in the complex business of ‘feeding the family’, which involves much more than just cooking, but also complex logistical and organising skills as well as emotional work.146 Whilst men tend to earn many compliments and much kudos when they cook, the far more difficult organising and orchestration of daily meal planning that women have to do, according to Maushart, “can be a real drag, even when it is acknowledged and appreciated”, which, she adds, “most of the time (it) isn’t.”

This is supported by British sociologist, Anne Murcott, who, in reviewing her 1950’s research on the subject, found that women are still overwhelmingly doing the day-to-day family cooking and the planning of meals, whilst when men “did undertake some of the cooking . . . ‘this was from choice rather than necessity and they were excessively praised for their efforts.’” Maushart describes this as a case of “blokes invariably get(ting) the good bits . . . aptly described as ‘skimming off the cream’.”147 As a recent Australian newspaper article explains, despite “newly married husbands whipping up a Jamie Oliver risotto for Saturday night’s dinner guests”, the reality is that “women continue to shoulder more of the burden in the household.”148 I suggest that perhaps a more accurate measure of equality in marriage is not who cooks, given its creatively rewarding potential, but rather who cleans the toilet!

Conclusion

In this article I have applied a feminist analysis to help explain the existence of a culinary hierarchy in western culture. I have argued and conclude that the low status accorded women’s domestic cooking results from a combination of the nature/culture divide and the sexual division of labour with which it is connected. Thus, women are aligned with the devalued private realm which has resulted in them and activities performed by them being accorded low status. Men and their activities are, however, associated with the more highly valued public sphere so that men’s cooking, in contrast to women’s, is and continues to be “mainly public cooking, the cooking of money and prestige.”149
Notes

2 Although Goody acknowledges the “dangers of generalising about Africa, even West Africa, on the basis of such limited studies” (p. 41), he considers that for the purposes of analysing the reasons for the absence of a differentiated or hierarchical culinary system in Sub-Saharan Africa, such a generalisation is justified on the basis of the lack of plough cultivation in all African countries lying south of the Sahara (with the exception of Ethiopia, where both plough agriculture and a culinary hierarchy does exist. pp. 210–215).
3 ibid., p. 99.
6 Engels (*The Origin of the Family*), for instance, believed that a shift from relatively egalitarian clan-based hunter-gather groups to class-based hierarchical society happened as a result of the development of settled agricultural life.
7 “In the overwhelming majority of societies cooking is the woman’s work” . . . done “within the domestic context.” Ortner, op. cit., p. 80.
9 “Despite all the variability, the fact remains that all known human societies have some sort of division of labor along sex lines.” Leibowitz, Lila, “Origins of the Sexual Division of Labor” in *Woman’s Nature*, p. 125. Not all theorists agree, however, with this position. Adrienne Zihlman, for instance, states that “A division of labor probably evolved late in human evolution . . .” op. cit. p. 103. She also says that “We cannot assume a division of labor such as occurs in living peoples to apply automatically to the past.” Ibid., p. 105.
12 Rosaldo, op. cit., p. 19. Whilst the concentrated and high nutrient value of meat contributes to making it a highly valued food in most cultures (Abrams, 1987), it is significant, I would suggest, that such a highly valued food is associated with males and male activity, with it’s association with males contributing in turn to its high social value.
13 Goody describes the depiction on the walls of the Pharoahs’ tombs of men baking and cooking, doing the work that was performed by women of that time in the everyday domestic sphere. op. cit. p. 102. However, in contrast to this, in Sub-Saharan Africa the cooking in royal or chieftains’ households was done by women who cook “not in the role of household servants, but in that of wives, [with] the menus showing little change from the recipes of ordinary life.” p. 193. This may explain why an haute cuisine didn’t develop in Sub-Saharan Africa – that is, because the cooking of the court was done by women, they did domestic cooking, not feeling the need to separate or elevate themselves above everyday female cooking in the way that men have in the same situation.
14 ibid., p. 193.
15 ibid. However, there are notable exceptions to this, namely Morocco and Thailand, where royal or courtly cooking is traditionally done by women. Ann Cooper (1998), *A Woman’s Place is in the Kitchen*, notes that historically men who were army cooks were ‘selected from the ranks’ to become cooks in royal kitchens. p. 6.
16 ‘Gastronomy’ meaning ‘the science or art of good eating’.
17 Michael Symons (1998: *The Pudding that Took a Thousand Cooks*) contends that the antagonism of Plato to the ‘pleasures of the table’ accounts for the general ambivalence and distrust in western culture to cooks and cooking. Plato considered that the ‘pleasures of the table’, which – along with other sensual pleasures (usually associated with women) – reduced men to a lower, more ‘animal-like’ level. Despite this, gastronomy flourished in classical Greece, and indeed was probably born there.

18 Symons, ibid., p. 41.


20 Goody, ibid., p. 103. These books were also discourses on etiquette and manners and on the ‘good life’ in general. These early texts were also concerned with matters to do with health, being intended “to permit (the) reader to enjoy the pleasures of the table without violating certain moral and aesthetic rules . . . and to advise him on what is good for his health”’, a combination that remained ‘a constant in amateur manuals of gastronomy down to almost the nineteenth century.’ (Revel, p. 118).

21 Goody, ibid.

22 quoted in Goody, ibid. As Symons says, these wealthy gastronomes who philosophised about cooking, “did not even enter the kitchen”. One such, Damoxenus, a follower of Epicurus, said: “I sit near by and watch, while others do the work: to them I explain the principles and the result.” (cited, Symons, op. cit., p. 42.)

23 During Roman times the trade in spices from India, China, South-East Asia, East Africa, Persia and Arabia was an extremely important part of the Empire’s wealth and commerce. (Goody, op. cit., p. 105). Their often-extravagant use became the main distinguishing feature of wealthy, aristocratic cooking throughout Europe until the end of the Middle Ages. (Mennell, op. cit., p. 53.) Also the insatiable desire for spices was the main motive behind much early European exploration and colonialism. For instance, Columbus was actually looking for the spice riches of the East Indies when he mistakenly discovered America. Also, the fabulous wealth of Venice, which enabled it to patronise the arts as it did during the Renaissance, was built largely on the spice trade.

24 In fact, it would probably be reasonable to argue that there was more variety between the cooking of the peasantry from different regions within Europe, with their reliance on what was locally available, in contrast to a standardised and formal aristocratic cuisine heavily reliant on spices.

25 It is often incorrectly assumed that the heavy use of spices in medieval cooking was an attempt to disguise tainted meat, when in fact the main purpose of their use was an expression of extravagant ostentation. (Mennell, op. cit., p. 53.)

26 In contrast to the high meat consumption of the wealthy aristocracy, European peasantry “saw meat (such as beef) three times a year – at Christmas, Easter and at the celebration of the town’s patron saint – rare moments of plenty in a life marked by scarcity. What meat there was usually came from the household pig, its meat preserved and conserved in an amazing variety of ways, to be eaten in small portions or as flavorings throughout the entire year.” (Carol Field *In Nonna’s Kitchen*, p. 10).

27 Goody, ibid., p. 133.

28 This class distinction is enshrined in the English language: the words for ‘beef’, ‘mutton’, ‘pork’ and ‘veal’ are derived from the French which was spoken by the ruling Norman aristocracy, who, being wealthy, consumed large quantities of meat, whilst the words for the animals from which the meat comes, ‘ox’, ‘sheep’, ‘pig’ and ‘calf’ are Anglo-Saxon in origin, the language of the English Saxon peasantry.
Goody, ibid., p. 135.
Revel, Jean-François (1982), *Culture and Cuisine*, p. 145.
Mennell, Stephen (1985), *All Manners of Food*, pp. 216 & 218. As Elisabeth Luard (1987) says: “The limitations imposed by a single pot, a single heat source, local produce, and little or no access to imports are all characteristic of peasant cooking and give it its particular identity. But in no sense does this mean that the ingredients were necessarily poor or inferior…” *The Old World Kitchen*, p. xiv.
Famine, due to war, epidemic or harvest failure, was an ever-present threat for the poor throughout much of European history. Camporesi, (1989), *The Magic Harvest*, p. 22. However, this did not mean that they did not eat well during times of plenty. (Luard, op. cit.)
See, for instance, Luard, op. cit.
Mennell, Wheaton, Goody et. al.
Mennell, op. cit., p. 67.
Mennell, ibid., p. 67.
Mennell, ibid., p. 148. Goody cites the example of a certain Magaridou from the Auvergne who, despite producing a ‘special cookbook’ herself, nevertheless “had a horror of . . . cookbook(s)”, fearing that “the recipes of her grandmother might ‘abimer en les écrivant’” (get spoiled in the writing of them.) (ibid) Similarly, Carol Field reports that “Writing recipes for their food struck many women as absurd. ‘There aren’t recipes’, said one, ‘there are ingredients’,.” *(In Nonna’s Kitchen*, p. 27). These are women who are confident in their food knowledge and in control at the stove. As Field writes: “It is the rare grandmother who cooks from a written recipe. These women already knew what they were doing. They measure *all’occhio* (by eye), they scoop up *un pugno* (a handful, literally a fistful), and they pour *al dito* (by the finger).” *(ibid., p. 26).*
Mennell, p. 64.
Ibid., p. 67.
Ibid., p. 71.
Ibid.
Ibid. p. 201.
Ibid. Interestingly, in contrast to France, there is a long tradition in England of cookbooks written by women, a tradition going back to Elizabethan times. These women usually ran aristocratic or upper-class households, and wrote manuals that often combined recipes, including, especially in Elizabethan times, recipes for distilling, and treatises on the art of household management. Well-known examples are Elinor Fettiplace in Elizabethan England, and Eliza Acton and Isabelle Beeton in Victorian England. The recipes of these English cookbooks written by women were generally good ‘country cooking’ rather than the elaborate concoctions of their contemporary French male chefs. *(ibid. p. 213).*
Nevertheless, he did have the ‘generosity’ to allow that even though
there are ‘modern Sophies’ “who do strive with success for the triumph of their art, . . . (the ) Georges Sands of cookery are scarcely more numerous than the Georges Sands of literature, but . . . have no less right to the esteem of every connoisseur.” (!) Ibid, p. 203.

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 204.
52 Ibid.
53 Jones, Louise (1993), “Women Cooks of Provence”. Quoted, p. 73. Even when sexist attitudes aren’t as obvious or as explicit as that expressed by Bocuse, they still permeate the writings of many male culinary historians and gastronomes. For instance, speaking of traditional rural cooking in Provence in his *La Cuisine Provencale de Tradition Populaire*, Rene Jouveau describes cooking as being “always the expression of a particular soil, . . . the fruit of a whole civilisation, an entire heritage handed down from father to son, throughout the centuries. . .” (cited in Jones, p. 83, my italics).

54 *Les meres lyonnaises* have a history going back to the late C18th, when, usually as wives of skilled craftsmen in the silk industry of Lyon, they were cooks and housekeepers for the workers in the artisans’ guilds. Many of them opened their doors to the public, running and cooking in their small restaurants, which were renowned for their good cooking and informal conviviality. Probably the most famous this century was la Mere Brazier, who inherited the restaurant from her mother, and whose own granddaughter has since inherited the running of it from her. (*ABC Food Programme*, 12 March, 1995).

56 Bocuse, Paul (1978), *The Cuisine of Paul Bocuse*.
57 The failure of many male chefs to acknowledge sources of their recipes in their egotistical desire to claim ownership is also commonplace on TV cooking shows. For instance the hugely popular and successful British TV cook, Jamie Oliver, happily draws on the peasant based cooking of particularly Italy and the Middle East, without acknowledging that he is doing so. Apart from the fact that this is drawing on the traditional female cooking of these regions, without giving credit where it is due, this appropriation without due recognition contributes, I would argue, to an erosion of individual regional culinary traditions. However, there are notable exceptions to this tendency. Examples are Antonio Carlucci (BBC, *Carlucci’s Italian Feast*) and Stefano di Piero (*ABC, Gondola on the Murray*). Di Piero, for instance, who prefers to call himself a cook rather than a chef, freely acknowledges his debt to his mother’s home cooking, upon which his own is based. Also, British chef and restaurateur, Rick Stein, says his idea of great cooking is that done by an older French or Italian woman who in the course of daily domestic cooking has accumulated several decades of knowledge and expertise. (BBC *Rick Stein’s Seafood Odyssey*).

58 Jones, op. cit. p. 76.
60 Jones, op. cit. p. 73.

This rejection of extravagant ostentation has been taken to the opposite extreme by many fashion conscious chefs, with miniscule amounts of artfully arranged food in the middle of huge white plates, an image typifying this *nouvelle cuisine*. This extreme reaction, however, has now given way to a more balanced approach.

61 Jones, ibid., p. 72.
62 Ibid., p. 74.
63 *ABC Food Programme*, op. cit.
64 Ibid.
Ibid. In his attempts to mystify the idea of cooking as 'high culture', raising it above its female and peasant roots, Revel contradicts himself, arguing that "great cuisine is not only the cuisine of the rich" and that the "wealthy classes are not necessarily those who eat the best" (p. 23), stating that from personal experience, some of the best dishes he has ever tasted have been amongst the poor peasants of Mexico and Sicily (that is, the cooking of peasant women.) However, according to Revel, although "the more primitive a dish is, the more tasty it is . . . it does not belong to the domain of art, but rather that of ethnology or a mixture of biology and ethnology." (ibid.)

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67 Revel, op. cit., p. 3.
66 Ibid., p. 22.
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69 She revises this view somewhat in a later review of her essay (partly as a result of critiques of it by writers such as Leacock), asserting that there do appear to be some cultures, although few in number, where relations between men and women can be defined as 'egalitarian'. Nevertheless, she considers that even in these, "positions of influence and authority" still tend to be occupied "predominantly by men." Ortner, Sherry (1996), "So, Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in Making Gender: the Politics and Erotics of Culture, p. 175.
70 Leacock, Eleanor Burke (1981), Myths of Male Dominance, p. 157. She cites the example of women in Iroquois society whose high status and autonomy was based on the fact that they were able to "control the conditions of their work and the dispensation of the goods they produce(d)." p. 152. She states that this female autonomy was undermined by contact with Europeans. She also states that the prejudices of western observers and contamination of, for instance, the Iroquois culture with western values accounts for the (mis)interpretation of such cultures as being non-egalitarian. Nevertheless, Rosaldo points out that in Iroquois society, even though "powerful women might instate and depose their rulers, . . . Iroquois chiefs were (still) men." Rosaldo, Michelle Zimbalist, "A Theoretical Overview" in Woman, Culture and Society, p. 20. She states that "Everywhere, from those societies we might want to call most egalitarian to those in which sexual stratification is most marked, men are the locus of cultural value." Ibid.
72 Ibid., p. 44.
73 Goody, op. cit., p. 206. In fact this association of 'sacred' or ceremonial cooking with men also exists in present-day India, where "whenever ceremonial food is cooked and particularly when the quantity is large, it is men who do the cooking." Khare & Rao (1986), Food, Culture and Society, p. 155.
74 Furst L'Orange, Elisabeth "Cooking and Femininity", p. 442.
75 e.g. Plumwood; Ortner, Rosaldo, et al.
76 Margaret Mead, cited in Woman, Culture and Society, Introduction.
77 A particularly striking example of the different meaning and higher value placed on gendered cultural practices is that of the veil. The veil when worn by women, for instance in Muslim societies, is a sign of their social inferiority and subordination, designed to cover up the 'shame' of their female sexuality. However, in contrast to this, amongst the Tuareg of the central Sahara, the veil is not worn by women, but by men, upon whom it confers social distance and prestige, with "high-status men wear[ing] their veils more strictly than . . . slaves or vassals." Rosaldo, Michelle Zimbalist, "Woman, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview" in ibid., p. 27.
Ortner, op. cit., p. 80.

Symons, op. cit., p. 104; Ortner, ibid., p. 80. Levi-Strauss points out that “a common feature in all such myths (about the origins of fire) is the suggestion that by obtaining fire and being able to cook their food, people became truly ‘human.’” Cited in Goudsblom, Johan (1975), *Fire and Civilisation*, p. 2

Symons, op. cit., p. 104; Ortner, ibid., p. 80. Levi-Strauss points out that “a common feature in all such myths (about the origins of fire) is the suggestion that by obtaining fire and being able to cook their food, people became truly ‘human.’” Cited in Goudsblom, Johan (1975), *Fire and Civilisation*, p. 2


82 Goudsblom, Johan, op. cit., p. 35.

83 Ibid., p. 17.

84 Goudsblom, op. cit., He states that, according to some authorities, “the attention that people had to pay to their cooking would have supplied them with the ‘first subtle and intimate knowledge of matter’, thus forming the basis for the further development of the empirical sciences.” p. 35.

85 e.g. Tiger, Lionel and Fox, Robin (1972), *The Imperial Animal*.


Stanley suggests that the Greek myth of Prometheus, who is said to have stolen fire from the gods is really about the stealing by men from women of fire and the powers associated with it. p. 292. Other writers, though, caution against the use of myths as definitive proof or historical evidence. Michele Rosaldo, for instance, says that the many myths that exist in numerous cultures about the male takeover of fire from women are often used to ‘prove’ the previous existence of matriarchal societies; she, however, prefers to see these as “cultural reflections of the often tenuous and conflict-ridden nature of male claims to authority, rather than as historical accounts.”


88 Goudsblom says that with the development of cooking technology “the range of plant food was extended considerably and many new sources of protein, starch and carbohydrate became available.” Also, “cooking enhanced human life” because “it removed or lessened the harmful effects of noxious compounds.” Op. cit., p. 34.

89 Zihlman, op. cit., p. 75.

90 Ibid., p. 97.

91 Ibid, p. 98. Zihlman also argues “that gathering and not hunting was the initial food-getting behaviour that distinguished ape from human. This was an innovation whereby human females used tools to obtain food for themselves, as well as to sustain their young through the long period of dependency, walked long distances, and carried food bipedally on the African savannas.” Op. cit., p. 93.

92 Mies, op. cit., p. 77.

93 Mies, op. cit., p. 77.

94 Ibid, p. 216. (my italics)

95 MacMillan, Carol (1982), *Women, Reason and Nature*, p. 6. This thinking as been much critiqued by feminists, especially ecofeminists.

96 E.g. Griffin, Susan (1978), *Woman and Nature*.


98 Ibid. MacMillan says that “by tearing activities out of their contexts and by failing to see that it is the particular surroundings in which they occur, . . . we assume, mistakenly, that those activities for which there is a parallel in
the animal world are not distinctly human.” She adds: “Indeed, one reason why the whole issue of the humanity of women is problematic is precisely because it is assumed that human beings demonstrate their capacity for reason only in those activities which are absolutely distinct from those of animals.”

100 Ortner, op. cit., p. 80.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.

Paula Wolfert (1998), speaking of the traditions of Mediterranean cooking, says: “Mediterranean cooking . . . is ultimately a medley of cuisines prepared by women. The knowledge is passed down through generations, mother to daughter to granddaughter, women’s knowledge, women’s skills, women’s secrets . . . and, thus, perhaps also, women’s power.” Mediterranean Grains and Greens, p. xiii.

103 Goudsblom, op. cit. p. 4. In their role as teachers and socialisers of children, women are undoubtedly transmitters of culture. Their role as cultural transmitters has its positive aspects, as in the passing on of culinary tradition, for instance. However, women are often also expected to be the guardians and transmitters of some of the most conservative aspects of patriarchal culture. A particularly glaring example is that of religious fundamentalism, even though these very values that women are expected to preserve and perpetuate are often those that are most oppressive to them as women themselves. The key point here, however, is that, although male supremacy allows and often expects women to be transmitters of culture, it does not allow that women can be creators of culture.

104 Symons, op. cit., p. 32. Symons says that “The very repetitiveness of cooking is part of the reason why many Western intellectuals have snubbed it.” p. 26.

105 Revel, op. cit., p. 234. (original italics).
106 Ibid., p. 149. (my italics).
107 Symons, op. cit. He recognises also that “Good cooking . . . relies on predictability”. It depends on routines. It demands a practiced hand, keen eye and grounded intuition rather than any frenzied leap of creation, p. 25.

108 Plumwood, op. cit., p. 48. (my italics)

110 Symons, op. cit., pp. 26 & x.

111 Plumwood, op. cit., p. 45.

112 Ibid., p. 35.

113 Ibid., p. 69.

114 Dickenson, op. cit., p. 10. Although women’s work has generally been considered not to add value since at least the time of Classical Greece, this has not necessarily been linear, but has fluctuated in emphasis throughout history. In pre-industrial society the household was the main economic unit with work by both men and women being largely done within the household or domestic sphere. Both men and women were seen to be contributing to the household economy. The Scientific Revolution which occurred in Europe during the C15th to C17th, whose most influential theorist was Francis Bacon (1561–1626), “celebrated father of modern science”, revived the misogynist thinking of Aristotle and reinforced the nature/culture divide and hence the devaluation of women. Carolyn Merchant, (1980), The Death of Nature.

115 Reproductive labour generally refers to that which is to do with the actual biological reproduction of human life – i.e. childbearing – and those activities which are seen to reproduce human relations and human labour. These ‘reproductive’, life-sustaining and life-maintaining activities are
centred in the domestic domain. Maureen Mackintosh (1981) points out that, in fact, “the process of reproduction of labour contains within it a great many productive tasks”, (and) “there is . . . no way in which we can divide up social activity into distinct spheres of production and reproduction.” Of Marriage and the Market, p. 10. She says that “what has concerned feminists is that certain of these activities, in particular societies, appear to be more closely tied into the relations of reproduction than do others.” (Ibid.)

119 Symons, op. cit., p. 343.
121 Dickenson, ibid., p. 131, (my italics).
123 Ibid., p. 88. Delphy states that “It is often argued that housework is unpaid (free) because it is not productive, and that it is not productive because it ‘does not enter into the system of values’, i.e. it does not pass through the market. Not only is this a poor explanation, it is above all a curious definition of productivity, because . . . some non-market products, consumed by their producers, are accounted and treated as productive. The absence of passage through the market (or not having it exchanged) is thus not the reason for the status of domestic work.” (Ibid., p. 84).
124 She asserts that far from not having relevance to contemporary non-agricultural society, the situation of rural women in fact illustrates the unremunerated nature of all women’s domestic labour because “contemporary farm families are sufficiently distant from many of us to enable us to see features of their families’ lives clearly, which in return show us things we had taken for granted in our own situations.” (Ibid., original italics, preface by Diana Leonard, p. 11). See also Delphy and Leonard (1992), Familiar Exploitation, for a more detailed analysis of this.
125 Ibid., p 63.
126 Ibid.
128 Dickenson, p. 30.
129 Ibid., p. 233.
131 Mies, op. cit., p. 86.
132 Dickenson, ibid., p. 126. Marx stated that: “Domestic work meets the requirements of producing in a human manner, which affirms my own and other people’s existences by giving a concrete expression to my individuality, allowing others to enjoy the product of my labour, mediating between others and the human species, and realizing my own communal and human essence.” (From Marx’s 1844 Manuscripts, cited in Harstock, p. 5.)
133 Ibid., p. 119.
134 Ibid., p. 118.
135 Ibid., p. 120. Dickenson questions the “common assumption that women simply are property”. She prefers to see women as “impaired subjects” rather than objects, agreeing with Carole Pateman’s “sexual contract metaphor” which presents “women as both agents and objects,” allowing them “just so much agency as is required for them to will their own subordination.” p. 119.
136 Delphy, ibid., pp. 94 & 95. She states that “The reason why housework is not considered to be productive and why it is not accounted is because it is not paid, or exchanged in the general fashion. And this is not because of the
nature of the services which make it up, but because one can find any or all of
them on the market; nor is it because of the nature of the people who do it,
because the same woman who cooks a chop unpaid in her home is paid when
she does it in another household. It is because of the particular nature of the
(marriage) contract which ties the female – the wife – to the household of her
‘master’.” Ibid., p. 88.

137 Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 189.
138 Kynaston, op. cit., p. 224.
139 Harding, Sandra (1986), *The Science Question in Feminism*, p. 156.
140 Ibid.
141 Delphy, op. cit., p. 97. Delphy states that at any one time 80% of women
are married.
142 e.g. Stephanie Alexander in Australia and Alice Waters in the U.S., both
of whom have established their own renowned and highly regarded
restaurants. Also, Julia Childs is a household name in the U.S., having
promoted over many decades the art of French cooking in that country
(‘Mastering the Art of French Cooking’ by Julia Childs and Simone Beck);
nevertheless, in contrast to, for instance Paul Bocuse, she, like women cooks
generally, is considered a mediator rather than a creator of cuisine.
143 And, as I have already suggested, professional women chefs probably
have no such ambition, generally being more concerned with the quality of
their cooking than with egotistical self-promotion.

144 I speak from personal experience. See also Fine (op cit) and Anthony
Bourdain’s *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly* for
descriptions of this. A (possibly extreme) example of this macho ethos in
male-run restaurant kitchens is that of the notorious British chef, Gordon
Ramsay who “had no particular interest in cooking when he started”, but
decided he enjoyed cooking when he discovered that “kitchens could be just

146 De Vault (1991) states that “Most would assume that ‘meal
preparation’ refers to the discrete tasks of cooking. Meals, however, depend
on more than food alone. They come into being as socially organized events,
with recognizable form and tempo. ‘Doing a meal’, then, requires more than
just cooking; it takes thoughtful foresight, simultaneous attention to several
different aspects of the project, and a continuing openness to ongoing events
and interaction. These kinds of effort must be considered part of the work of
feeding a family, but they are seldom identified as work: they remain invisible
even as they are done.” (p. 55).

147 Maushart, Susan (2001), p. 124. Maushart states that an Australian
study found that although “men perform on average only 16% of the labour
involved in looking after their own children .... they claim 40% of time spent
in play or recreation.” p. 123) Also, “Virtually all studies of the division of
parenting tasks have shown that blokes invariably get the good bits: the
‘tasks’ of playing with, reading to and conversing with their kids.” (Ibid. p.
124)
149 Furst, L’Orange, op. cit, p. 442.