Television As a *Trattoria*

Constructing the Woman in the Kitchen on Italian Food Shows

Introduction

Gender is an enlightening lens through which food TV may be analysed (Voski Avakian and Haber, 2005: 6). Food television is in fact 'associated both with the elite world of the professional chef and with the realm of 'women's work"(Lewis, 2008: 58).

This article analyses three daily cooking shows broadcast by mainstream Italian television around noon in the period from October 2011 to June 2012. The article focuses on the roles of the woman in the kitchen in these shows, and on their relationships to the opposite categories of home and professional cooking. As argued by Goody (1982: 139) and Mennell (1996), home and professional cooking have developed as two separated and often opposing fields. However, in a process of social change in which diverse elements continually renegotiate reality (O'Connor, 2006: 78), they may constitute two opposite poles through which TV mediates a new role of the woman in the kitchen. Related to this, my research question asks: how do Italian daily cooking shows construct the role of the woman in the kitchen through the categories of home and professional cooking?

By 'mainstream Italian television' this article means the three broadcasters RAI, Mediaset and La7. Italian mainstream television, originating in 1954 (Emanuelli, 2004: 35), reflects a traditional idea of TV designed for a wide audience, while the many new thematic channels, starting in the late 1990s, are made up of programmes for smaller and diversified publics (Brigida et al., 2004: 109, 143-144). This is 'audience segmentation' (Rayner et al., 2003: 104-105), undertaken by post-modern television all over the world. In Italy, mainstream channels get about 70 percent of the total rating, while thematic channels around 30 percent

(Zaccuri, 2012). This research analyses mainstream television at noon because this is the slot in which food TV is prevalently broadcast in Italy. There was an experiment of a cooking show broadcast in prime time (*La Notte degli Chef*, by Mediaset), but it did not get a big audience and was not aired anymore (Rubino, 2011). Before starting the analysis, however, this article focuses on the theoretical framework on which this research is based.

Theoretical Framework: Constructing Gender and Cooking

Postfeminism may help understand the relationships between women and cooking in popular culture. The postmodern superwoman that manages career, childcare, sexual life and cooking skills without any problem has been seen, by postfeminists, either as the positive result of 1970s feminism's gains, or as a negative backlash against what feminism had achieved (Hollows, 2000: 190-195; Sanders, 2009: 153). In various studies about women and cooking in popular culture, Nigella Lawson has been considered as the clearest example of this ambiguous role. For Sanders, she 'can position herself in one way and be interpreted quite differently by her viewers and still differently by critics' (Sanders, 2009: 154). Hollows writes that Nigella was 'variously positioned as the prefeminist housewife, as an antifeminist Stepford wife, as the saviour of downshifting middle-class career women and as both the negative and positive product of postfeminism' (Hollows, 2003a: 180). Interestingly, Hollows finds that Nigella mediates 'between the feminist and the housewife' (Hollows, 2003a: 188). For Williams, residual, emergent and dominant elements contribute to negotiating any social change (O'Connor, 2006: 78). Hollows finds that Nigella's residual element consists of a sort of fantastic nostalgia for the past, when a mythical (never existing) woman inhabited the

kitchen. This 'golden age' is the fantastic space offered by Nigella to her audience as a place of common identification (Hollows: 2003a: 188).

All of this must be contextualised in a relativist and constructionist scenario. Milestone and Meyer (2012) have demonstrated that popular culture is not only affected by, but also shapes gender stereotypes, in all of the stages of the process of communication, from production to representation to consumption (Milestone and Meyer, 2012: 1). Related to this, socially constructed reality is inhabited by socially constructed subjects, also stereotyped in relation to gender roles. Moreover, each ideology, from feminism to conservatism, constructs its own woman, with different degrees of passivity or activity (Milestone and Meyer, 2012: 24). It is power, in the end, that decides what is true within a society, constructing the so called 'regimes of truth' (Milestone and Meyer, 2012: 26). Finally, there is the problem of the prejudices about the quality of women's work, generally considered lower than men's (Frink and Weedman, 2005: 5).

In Italy, this work argues, cooked food challenges this prejudice. Female cooking is constructed as being better and, as demonstrated below, constitutes an opportunity for media to balance gender roles. First of all, Italian food is part of the national identity (Livolsi, 2011: 186; Stano, 2012), to the point that a special corp of the Italian army is aimed at fighting falsifications of Italian food (Parasecoli, 2004: 192) and that a minister caught eating at a Chinese restaurant was strongly criticized and had to apologise for it (Merlo, 2011). But food, in Italy, is indissolubly linked to women (Barzini, 2006: 17-18), who therefore, even from the kitchen, participate in the construction of the national identity.

Counihan (1984) points out that when Italian women made bread at home, their relationships with men were more balanced than when bread started being bought at the supermarket. The power of the female bread-maker is also confirmed by Kanafani-Zahar (1997). Once out of the kitchen and at the office, Italian women lose their ‘private’ power and acquire a ‘public’

power, which is more uncertain and stressful (Counihan, 1999). Steel finds that Italy is the 'bastion of motherly home cooking' (Steel, 2009: 195), which is seen not as a form of inferiority, but as an opportunity to balance gender relationships. Finally, the traditional role of the Italian woman in the kitchen is confirmed by the Slow Food movement's approach to the matter. Slow Food is a left-wing movement that defends local and fair food. It has always backed the weaker subjects but, strangely, has never called into question the role of the Italian woman in the kitchen. Understandably, this approach has raised issues. 'There is silence on the fact that … the slow preparation of food may be impractical or an added burden, presumably for women … [This] is hardly mentioned in Slow Food publications' (Meneley, 2004: 171). Moreover, 'is Slow Food a conservative movement ... in that it conserves traditionally binding gender roles?', asks Spring Kurtz (2008: 105). Finally,

> one of the original funder of the Italian Slow Food movement, Fabio Parasecoli, warns that the place of women in Slow Food is worrisome … Their role would be to stay at home and protect it against the evil forces that haunt our present (Probyn, 2012: 58).

Slow Food, however, did not originate in Italy by chance. It represents deep Italian mindsets in terms of superiority of local and national food (Kjorstad, 2007: 185). Thus, this article argues that this conservative Slow Food view on women exists because it is impossible to defend traditional Italian food and at the same time fight the traditional role on the woman in the kitchen, because they are two halves of the same constructed food culture, which is a foundation of 'Italy-building'.

Parasecoli, moreover, has investigated the second category, that of professional cooking. He finds that just because home cooking in Italy is so well-considered, professional cooking is

continuously underrated, to the point that a chef's 'style and their techniques they are educated in are often considered old-fashioned and unhip' (Parasecoli, 2004: 126). The weakness of the chef in Italian food culture and on Italian television has also been underlined by Carlo Petrini, *Slow Food's* founder. When mentioning the Italian personalities that have been decisive in Italian food culture on TV, he cites a gastronomist, Luigi Veronelli, an actress, Ave Ninchi, and a writer, Mario Soldati (Petrini, 2005: 28). No chef appears on his list. However, in the last few years, male chefs have been spreading over the new satellite channels. This is a new trend that may be considered emergent, in Williams's sense, in the continuously changing Italian scenario.

What is more, home cooking is so deeply rooted in Italy that it also affects professional cooking. The most beloved Italian restaurants are in fact the so called *trattorie*, where 'the cooks were prevalently women, while their husbands worked the tables and were in charge of the clients. It was, and still is, common to find women preparing and selling food in stalls on the street' (Parasecoli, 2004: 126). In this type of restaurants, women are cooks and entrepreneurs, but not chefs (Capatti and Montanari, 2003: 238). *Trattoria* cooking, thus, is a bastion of the local and a form of resistance against the global in which female cooking becomes professional. Similarly to the Nigella described by Hollows (2003a), as entrepreneurs in charge of the kitchen, women in *trattorie* mediate between the housewife and the feminist. There are two other interesting characteristics about *trattorie*: firstly, being simple and 'poor' Italian food also coveted by the higher classes (Capatti and Montanari: 2003: 37, 85, 86, 289), *trattorie* are often crowded with the rich (Bardolla and Ait, 2010: 16). Secondly, a further development of t*rattorie* is the so called '*Osterie* Slow Food', *trattorie* following the philosophy of the movement (Slow Food, 2013), providing food that is '*buono, pulito e giusto*' (good, clean and fair) (Petrini, 2005). At their entrances, the Slow Food brand guarantees the quality of the dishes served.

This work argues that the presenters of the three analysed shows embody this kind of cuisine. They, too, are not housewives but entrepreneurs (they promote their books and other industrial products in their shows) in charge of the kitchen, and are constructed to mediate between the old, obsolete, housewife and the active feminist role. The following section centres on the methodology applied in this work and on the analysis of the three cooking shows.

The Analysis

Methodology

This article analyses *La Prova del Cuoco*, broadcast by Rai 1 since 2000, which is the Italian version of the British format *Ready, Steady, Cook!*; *I Menù di Benedetta,* broadcast by La7 since 2011, and *Cotto e Mangiato,* broadcast by Italia 1 since 2007, which are instead original Italian formats. As said, they were the only daily cooking shows broadcast in Italy at noon by the mainstream channels from October 2011 to June 2012.

The analysis focuses on the episodes of these three series broadcast in the first complete week of each month, thus starting from the first Monday of every month, from October 2011 to June 2012. It applies semiotic and gender analysis to these episodes. 'Semiotics, or the science of signs, is primarily the study of how signs communicate. It is also the study of the rules which regulate the operation of each system of signs' (Taylor and Willis, 1999: 19). I draw on Pierce's distinction of three types of signs: icon, which looks like its semiotic object; index, which relates to the object by real or imagined link; and symbol, which relates to the object by conventions (Merrell, 2001: 31). This study highlights the signs that relate to gender issues, to understand the profound meanings that these signs represent. In fact,

semiotics tells us 'how meaning is socially produced (not individually created) and subject to power relations and struggles' (O'Sullivan and al., 1994: 282-283). All of this relates to the second technique that I apply to the three shows, gender analysis, which 'emphasizes the importance of analysing women, as well as men, in relation to each other rather than in isolation, and of understanding gender relations at all levels of social organization' (Jackson, 2002: 115). In the end, this method allows the article to investigate 'social change through the lens of gender identities' (Jackson, 2002: 114). The first analysed programme is *La Prova del Cuoco*.

La Prova del Cuoco

The Italian version of *Ready, Steady, Cook!*, in the second half of the show, is similar to the British format. The first part, however, is really different, and consists of a series of cooking demonstrations carried out by the presenter, the professional chefs, the housewife Anna Moroni, and the *maestre in cucina* (kitchen teachers), a group of women that are *trattorie* owners or cooking teachers. The presenter, Antonella Clerici, is not a professional chef, but an ex-sports journalist and a music show presenter who, during the show, continually promote her other TV shows and cookbooks. Moreover, she continually underlines that she is not a chef and that she is not able to cook (3 October, 7 November, 6 February, 5 March and others). *La Prova Del Cuoco* has always been presented by women, while from 2000 to 2010, the original British format was hosted by a man, Ainsley Harriott, who is also a professional chef.

The programme directly shows the fight between home and professional cooking in the weekly slot called *Anna contro Tutti* (Anna against the rest). In it, the presenter's assistant,

Anna Moroni, competes against chefs and *maestre*. Moroni is not a professional chef, but an ex-interpreter of the Australian embassy in Rome, passionate about cooking. When Moroni challenges the *maestre*, the clash is between two different forms of traditions. In the competition against Alessandra Spisni (6 February), for example, with the same techniques, the two women prepare ravioli from different Italian regions. The same happens against the Landra sisters (7 November). Differently, against male chefs the fight is on status, techniques and styles. For example, the chef Ivano Riccobono (5 December) recites a poem in which he says that he is a starred chef and Moroni will get what she deserves. Moroni answers that she considers his stars useless. When they cook, Riccobono shows how to make pesto with a pestle and mortar, while Moroni makes pesto with the food processor, saying that a working woman cannot make pesto with a mortar. On 7 May, the chef Cesare Marretti considers Moroni unable to cook and gives her a ball of wool and two knitting needles, asking her for a scarf, underlining the superiority of male cuisine.

The *maestre in cucina* cook their favourite recipes, which are often simple and popular (pastasciutta, chocolate cakes, etc). While they cook, they chat with the presenter about everything, as well as cooking. They talk about the weather (4 October), how to find the right husband (5 October), happiness (10 February), dancing (11 May) and when they make sexual jokes about men, the presenter tells a man near them to cover his ears. Sexual jokes among women comparing foods like meatballs, sausage or vegetables to men's genitalia are really frequent on the show (3 October, 9 November, 8 February, 5 March and others). Finally, the programme presents the first *maestro in cucina*, a male, Sergio Barzetti (8 November). He gives Clerici surreal indications on how to stir eggs (two times to the right, one time to the left), and says that he does it just to make something easy more complex, because otherwise people could find his cooking too simple and therefore less professional. Barzetti and Clerici go on chatting about his family.

Other times, male chefs are sexualised, rather than opposed to female cooking. The strong chef Gabriele Bonci is filmed while caressing a big chunk of mortadella (8 October), and when he sensually kneads the pizza dough, the presenter says that every time she sees Bonci massage the dough, she cannot help thinking how lucky his wife is (12 November, 11 February).

It is also interesting to analyse how the programme underlines Italianness and national identity. *Campanile Italiano* is a competition between all the Italian regions with the same mechanism of tennis tournaments. Two couples of t*rattorie* owners challenge each other by cooking traditional dishes. They are often mother and son, brothers or sisters, or simply friends, and, during the preparation, talk to Clerici about their activities and regions.

Finally, in *Casa Clerici* (Clerici's house) the presenter cooks in a very ironic way, set in a different corner of the studio that represents a 'normal' kitchen, with a bricked wall in the background and a fridge with magnets attached. Here, Clerici does not hide her mistakes (9 December, 5 March, 12 May) and always underlines that her dishes are very simple and all the women in the audience can do them without any difficulty.

I Menù di Benedetta

The programme is presented by the journalist Benedetta Parodi, whose first cookbook sold one million copies (Salis, 2011: 220), and who is considered the new Italian woman, that, although working, wants to cook good food (Strazzeri, 2011: 13). Before this programme, Parodi presented the first edition of *Cotto e Mangiato*, currently presented by Tessa Gelisio and analysed below.

In every episode of *I Menù di Benedetta*, Parodi, in a big studio reproducing a kitchen, hosts a celebrity (often an actor, a TV presenter or a journalist) who cooks along with her, even if they are not passionate about cooking

Each episode starts with the sound of the key in the keyhole. The door opens and Parodi enters the studio saying '*benvenuti a casa*' (welcome home). She often wears very high heels and the camera focuses on them while she walks through the set.

Parodi's kitchen is perfectly elegant: the big table she works on is always clean, the tools are always new and everything is shiny. Unusual camera angles provide stylish images of the kitchen from behind plants or kitchen tools. This is quite in contrast with the joyful and messy atmosphere of *La Prova del Cuoco*, and on 6 February Clerici, after making a mistake during a preparation, made fun of Parodi by saying that perfection is on another channel.

Elegance, moreover, is present in the programme also in other forms. Even when Parodi wants to save money (9 November), or cook with frozen food (7 March), she always promotes elegance. Parodi's kitchen seems not to have problems.

Problems regard, instead, the relationships within her family, which the programme often stereotypes in a gendered sense. In the programme, in fact, Parodi continually hints at her family, whose members are even present in the show as guests. When the guest is her husband Fabio, a popular sports journalist (5 March), she says that the episode is aimed at demonstrating how husband and wife can cook together. Soon Fabio answers that this means that she will cook and he will eat, and the elegant suit he wears clarifies that he is there not to cook. In fact, Parodi cooks and Fabio comments that her dress is too sexy, notes the wrong shape of the supplì (they must be oval!), reads the newspaper on the sofa, and calls his mother, the highest authority in the kitchen, for the final word on the supplì.

When Parodi hosts her sister Cristina, another TV journalist (8 December), a stereotyped (and constructed by the show) female competition rises between the two. They accuse each other

of wearing high heels just to appear higher and of not being able to cook. When Benedetta purposely throws a handful of flour over Cristina's dress, she reacts with a not exactly elegant insult, 'bastarda'. The two sisters only agree when they talk about their mother and her wonderful cakes.

Sometimes Parodi hosts famous male chefs, such as Filippo La Mantia (7 October) and Carlo Cracco (9 November), the chef that presents the Italian edition of MasterChef on a satellite channel. Filippo La Mantia does not prepare one of his professional dishes, but a very simple pasta, and gives the dish Parodi's name. Cracco, instead, polemically asks Parodi if she always dresses so elegantly when cooking, and gives the presenter an apron. The chef teaches Parodi how to make 'eggs a la Cracco', explains how to break eggs and, when it comes to separating the egg yolk from the white, does it excluding Parodi, because of the difficulty of the operation. Moreover, Cracco confirms that he sent a MasterChef contestant off the show for her/his inelegant style of putting salt on dishes. Cracco told him/her off, saying: You put salt on like a housewife. Commenting on Cracco's artistic gestures while cooking, Parodi questions these gestures, given that the final result would also be the same without artistic movements. Cracco answers that there is no reason for this.

Finally, when Parodi hosts foreign guests (3 October, 9 February, 10 May), she prepares dishes from their countries along with them. During the preparation, however, she changes some ingredients, 'italianising' the final result. Two of the three foreign guests, in the end, confess that they love Italian cuisine more that their original ones.

Cotto e Mangiato

Cotto e Mangiato (cooked and eaten) is a short program broadcast by Italia1 and hosted at first by Benedetta Parodi (until 2011, as said above) and later by Tessa Gelisio. Gelisio is a TV host and journalist who has often presented shows on nature and environmental issues.

The main characteristic of the programme is its short duration, never more than five minutes. During the programme, Gelisio simply explains and prepares her recipes, from the beginning to the end, in her actual kitchen, and lists all the steps in a very clear way. When hosted by Parodi, and set in Parodi's actual kitchen, the programme was centred on the concept of family and on how her husband and kids assessed the presenter's dishes.

Gelisio's *Cotto e Mangiato* is really different. She is a single woman without children and with no links to the traditional family, a journalist and an environmental campaigner who even founded a charity. Even this version of the show is set in the presenter's actual kitchen (a bit smaller and darker than Parodi's) and this gives the programme the same sense of reality as in Parodi's version. The set of the programme is really different from Parodi's perfection. On 3 October the chopping board is visibly stained, on 9 November the toppings of the *pizzette* leak out of the oven tray. Finally, Gelisio never discusses how to set table, in contrast to Parodi.

Gelisio talks about her real interest, environmental issues. In the episode of 5 October, for example, after frying potatoes, she reminds the audience not to pour the used oil in the sink, and advises them to contact the council offices that deal with it, as she usually does.

Moreover, Gelisio often advises her audience on how not to waste gas, energy, money and food, for environmental, health and economic reasons. Saving money is always a priority of the programme and the presenter often says the exact final price of each recipe (5 October, 9 November, 2 April). When she does not do it, a blackboard on the wall reports the cost of the recipe. On 8 May, she prepares a dish in which she leaves the external parts of a sandwich loaf out, but soon she explains how to reuse them in another recipe. On 2 April, she explains

how to use few kitchen tools, always reusing the same ones, in order not to waste both detergent and dishwasher energy. What is more, she explains how to buy food at Italian GAS (Gruppo di Acquisto Solidale, a cooperative between consumers to skip big retailers and buy food straight from producers), which she often recommends. Italian food seems to be the best remedy for health problems. On 3 October she recommends Italian blue fish, being less expensive than other fish and richer in Omega 3, and on 7 May explains why Italian IGP products (items of food with certified origins) are healthier that others. On 6 June, moreover, she recommends Italian organic ham, without colouring and preservatives. What is more, Gelisio, after preparing a meat dish, immediately provides its vegetarian version (9 November), does not put salt in a recipe because salt is already in the cheese she puts in the dish (6 February), leaves the tomato skin out for better digestion (6 February again), and replaces the fatter mascarpone cheese of the original recipe with the lighter ricotta (6 June). Lard and butter are almost totally banned from her recipes, and she always suggests Italian extra virgin olive oil.

Here Italianness is never linked to elegance, like in Parodi's show, but to health. Gelisio in fact almost always recommends, as said above, Italian produce like extra virgin olive oil, Italian radicchio, bresaola (7 May), certosa (8 May), ricotta cheese (6 June) and many other organic, DOP or IGP Italian foods.

Results

The most evident outcome of these three brief analyses is that, in Italy, on mainstream daily cooking shows at noon, all the presenters are both female and non-professional chefs. Moreover, all three partly replicate the mediation between the housewife and the feminist

theorised by Hollows for Nigella, but do it differently. Clerici, Parodi and Gelisio, in fact, do not need to place the hypothetical site of common identification with their audience in an idealised 'golden age', as in Hollows. What they refer to, instead, is something really concrete, the female cooking model of *trattorie,* as explained below. The second, related, most evident result is that males and professional chefs are either totally absent or, when on the shows, play secondary roles, without the powerful position that this figure holds in most Anglo-Saxon programmes (and in the original format on which *La Prova del Cuoco* is based).

La Prova del Cuoco is the show in which the gender divide between female and male cooking is constructed in a clearer way. The programme is made up of many slots that oppose the two models, such as in Anna Moroni's challenges. For example, the wool ball and needles that the male chef gives Moroni is a stereotyped symbol of the passive role of women in society. With this 'gift', thus, the man wants to underline that women can only knit while the kitchen on TV is a male, artistic, starred space. More in depth, however, at a psychoanalytical level, it is acknowledged that knitting 'stands for masturbation' (Spivak, 2012: 45). By this act, therefore, the male chef tries to further humiliate Moroni, relegating her and female cooking in general to an activity often represented as shameful.

Besides the clash between the two forms of cooking, the programme shows other moments which simply extoll female cooking. The *maestre in cucina's* recipes and *Casa Clerici* underline this trend. Interestingly, what visually distinguishes the *maestre in cucina* from the chefs is that while chefs (even the only woman among them) wear their uniforms, often totally white or black, the *maestre in cucina* wear 'normal' dresses to which they add an apron while cooking. Each of the *maestre* has her proper style of dressing, from the traditional to the unconventional. The result is that, while the chefs are homogenised by their uniforms, the *maestre in cucina* express their personalities even with their dressing style. Moreover, the gap

between chefs and *maestre* is widened by the fact that, while cooking, the *maestre* talk to Clerici about everything, while the chefs just explain what they are preparing. Equally interesting is the experiment of the first male *maestro* in cucina. Barzetti is constructed as a non-chef. With his surreal advice, he is ironic about the artistic style of many chefs and tells the presenter many details about his family, just like the other *maestre*. *Casa Clerici* follows this way. In a set that looks like a normal house, Clerici uses irony when she cooks her own recipes, and this helps negotiate opposite ends. In fact, on the one hand 'an ironic relationship to domesticity … has the potential to operate as an antidote to a strict feminist ideology that decries the kitchen as the site of subjugation' (Sanders, 2009: 154). On the other hand, being ironic about her poor results also helps Clerici distance herself from the traditional figure of the Italian housewife, which she also rejects when showing off her books and her work as a TV presenter.

Another form of gender division is the men's sexualization from a female point of view. Sexual jokes have long been the principal way in which men have harassed women, but today 'it can hardly been assumed that sexual jokes are alien to females' (Alvesson and Billing, 1997: 126). Sexual jokes establish and reinforce power relationships (Alvesson and Billing, 1997: 126) and hierarchies (Collinson, 2002). Therefore, in *La Prova del Cuoco,* sexual jokes among women (and men's exclusion from them) serve to further construct an environment in which women are represented as in charge and in which men have lower importance.

Men, however, are not always excluded or underrated. Bonci's massaging of food and the presenter's comments on the luckiness of his wife sexualise the chef. The sexual side of the celebrity chefs on TV has already been analysed by Hollows (2003b) in relation to Jamie Oliver, but this case is different. While Jamie Oliver, in fact, shows his sexuality in his show, and thus without any mediation, here the female presenter mediates between the sexuality of the chef and her audience, again representing the prevalence of the female point of view

within the female space. This kind of space is similar to a *trattoria*, and certainly the programme directly promotes the *trattoria's* values firstly with the massive presence of *trattoria* owners, and secondly with the simplicity of Clerici' and *maestre in cucina*'s dishes. For these reasons, drawing from Hollows (2003a), this article argues that the place that Clerici offers her audience to find a common identity is not fanciful, but real, and is just the *trattoria,* whose 'italianness' is also underlined by the contest between the regions. By drawing on Williams, this study argues that *trattoria* is the dominant form of cooking constructed in the show, while the residual and the emergent may be respectively considered the old passive housewife's role (that the presenter rejects, as seen) and male cooking, which is a new phenomenon in Italy, as demonstrated by its success on the 'new' satellite channels, as underlined in the theoretical framework.

Also Parodi mediates between the feminist and the housewife. She is certainly the Italian presenter closer to the superwoman theorised by postfeminists, and a great part of what Hollows (2003a) writes on Nigella may be applied to her. Many female guests on the show may also be considered as superwomen, and she calls one of them 'supermum' (11 May) due to the success she has had in all the roles she has played in her life.

The first signs that the show provides are the sound of the key in the keyhole, an opening door and a woman entering the home (often in high heels) bringing in the food she wants to prepare. Few other images could construct such a traditional representation of home and femininity and such a clear 'regime of truth', in the sense highlighted in the theoretical framework. Key, keyhole and door remind us of home, being the first things we deal with when we come back to our 'shelters', and also Parodi's daily phrase, welcome home, suggests this. More in depth, however, 'the key ... symbolises the opening and closing of doors to higher powers or knowledge' (Sule, 2008: 21). From the beginning of the show, therefore, Parodi presents herself as a powerful and skilled woman with access to power and

knowledge. But 'the key is also a sexual symbol and appears when you are denying your feelings - because it seems to say “here is what is needed to open”' (Hohne, 2009: 168). Therefore, the presenter also introduces herself as a sexualised subject, underlined by the camera's attention to her high heels. High heels are widely seen as 'a symbol of femininity' (Shapiro, 2010: 4). For all of these reasons, 'many feminists of the second wave refused to wear short skirts and high heels' (Gamble, 2001: 197). Traditional femininity is also underlined when Parodi wears sexy and elegant dresses while cooking. This causes jealousy in her husband and critiques from the chef Cracco, who gives her an apron. Jewellery and high heel shoes, again, are the reasons for the argument between the presenter and her sister. In conclusion, not irony as for Clerici, but high heels, sexiness and elegance are Parodi's ways of partly distancing herself from both the feminist and the housewife.

There are two other interesting gender issues raised by the programme: the way in which Parodi relates to male professional cooking, and how the show constructs her family and her relationships to it. Male chefs have two options in this programme. As La Mantia, they may give up their role of male chef and cook *pastasciutta* without any artistic presumption, while talking about their everyday lives. When they do so, they somehow shift towards home cooking and get closer to Parodi. Otherwise, they may stress their status as male chefs, as Cracco, who is on the brink of being impolite. It is clear that Parodi has a contradictory approach to male chefs in general. As a member of the 'elegant society', she admires them and the exclusivity that they provide. However, by saying that artistic gestures do not make sense, and by reminding the audience of Cracco's criticisms of how housewives put salt on, mean that she detaches herself from 'the chef'.

Finally, the show's construction of Parodi's family underlines exclusivity again, but also gender issues. The show in fact represents a family of famous TV journalists, but Parodi must cope with, in turn: a jealous husband who reads the newspaper on the couch and does not

help her in the kitchen; a mother in law that always defends her son; and a sister who competes with her on how to dress and who is taller. In representing a family which is profoundly real and never idealised, Parodi strongly differentiates herself from Nigella. Her elegant, chic home shows some trouble. As Clerici, also Parodi, then, does not meet her audience in a fantasy world, as Hollows finds for Nigella. Parodi's world is real. She lives in a family in which jealousy, envy and chauvinism exist, like in many families of her audience. On the other side, however, she is certainly not the woman cooking in *trattoria* and she does not host *trattoria* owners on the show. With her passion about simple food and criticisms of chefs, she is, instead, one of the affluent people appreciating *trattorie* and flocking to them as customers, as underlined in the theoretical framework. Thus, the *trattoria* model also helps the construction of this second show, although differently from Clerici.

Tessa Gelisio and her simple kitchen in *Cotto e Mangiato* represent still another form of cooking. The striking thing, from the beginning, is that the huge piece of mortadella hugged by a chef in *La Prova del Cuoco*, or the trendy camera angles in Parodi's kitchen that give the environment an elegant and classy touch, here are replaced by stained towels and burnt omelettes (Marighetti, 2011). All of this, and the fact that the programme is broadcast from the presenter's actual house, are surely aimed at bridging the gap between TV and reality. Kitchen utensils, Gelisio's dresses, furniture and above all food, in *Cotto e Mangiato*, are really similar to those that the audience may find at home. This is a big novelty in Italy, especially on a broadcaster, Mediaset, that has always constructed its representations on an idealised Italy, rather than on the Italian reality (Colombo, 2012).

To this really basic scenario, however, Gelisio adds two interesting (and revolutionary, for the Italian TV) novelties, the rejection of any difference between men and women and environmental issues, which are, as seen, totally overlooked by the other two programmes. Gelisio's programme could appear to be the 'most female' among the three shows, because

male chefs are never present in the programme and male cooking is never mentioned. Actually, however, the presenter simply ignores any difference between males and females. In fact, she never talks specifically to women or men while explaining how to cook (in contrast to Clerici and Parodi), she never tells the audience who she is cooking for, and female cooking is never opposed to male cooking because there is no difference between them. Related to this, Gelisio's dishes lack the constructed emotional side that is often present in female home cooking. When she describes her meals, there are not emotional meanings, affective reasons or sexual metaphors. While Clerici and Parodi are still anchored, with some nuances, to the traditional role of the Italian woman who cooks for her family, Gelisio is totally detached from this dimension. This could make the communication of the programme cold, but to this scenario, Gelisio adds her second novelty, which is equally revolutionary for this TV genre in Italy, the environmental issue. Even this element is not gendered at all. The final result is a very non-gendered home cooking, which may be deemed as 'female' just because of who cooks is a woman.

Even here, as in the previous analysed cases, Gelisio's audience can meet their favourite presenter not in a fantasised realm. Coping with money, dirty chopping boards, too fatty foods to avoid and right ways of wasting fried oil, Gelisio gives her non-gendered audience not only suggestions, but also values that may be shared. In doing so, Gelisio reflects the further development of the *trattoria* described in the theoretical framework, that of Slow Food *Osterie*. In her programme, in fact, food must be good, clean and fair, just like in Carlo Petrini's manifesto (2005). Local, Italian, IGP, DOP and traditional are the characteristics stressed by Gelisio, the same as Slow Food. In so doing, however, Gelisio inherits the Slow Food's contradiction of the role of the woman in the kitchen. In fact, her constructed character results partly in a feminist which relies on environment and nature, and rejects any difference between male and female roles in the kitchen; but also partly in a housewife coping with

prices and stains on the table, as in Slow Food's view. Thus, while Clerici and Parodi respectively show irony and femininity to distance themselves from the housewife and the feminist, Gelisio perfectly embodies partly the first and partly the second, anchored to the discussed Slow Food model.

Conclusion

Starting from the research question asked in the first section, this article has analysed how the Italian cooking shows construct the role of the woman in the kitchen through the categories of home and professional cooking. If Hollows finds that Nigella represents a negotiation between the feminist and the housewife, this article demonstrates that Italian TV constructs a similar mediation but in a different way. While in fact Nigella offers her audience a mythical place in which to find a common identification, to various degrees the three Italian presenters find this site in more actual spaces. Given that the final aim of this operation is, for the media, to balance gender relations, Italy offers a real model of female-professional cooking that may represent a solution, the *trattoria*. Today, the old model of traditional female home cooking, in which the woman is passive and subject to patriarchy, would be unacceptable for large part of the audience and here, in fact, this element only plays a residual role, in Williams's sense. However, the feminist view of a non-gendered kitchen would be too revolutionary, and is put forward, partially, just by the third show. The t*rattoria*, instead, negotiates a more modern female role as an entrepreneur without moving the woman from the kitchen. Therefore, the three analysed programmes construct the female role through this mediated model. *La Prove del Cuoco* directly represents *trattorie* by hosting female *trattorie* owners and showing them as superior to male chefs; Parodi embodies one of the members of the Italian affluent classes

that are interested in local and simple food and snub the male chefs' sophisticated dishes; Gelisio, finally, constructs her character as a Slow Food *osteria* owner, who cooks food totally in line with Petrini's manifesto. By constructing these three mediations, Italian TV does not subvert the traditional view that wants the woman in the kitchen, and at the same time gives women a more active role, finding a key to balancing gender inequalities.

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