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STAGING AND PERFORMING TRADITION IN KOSOVA RESTAURANTS

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ABSTRACT
In this essay, I describe and discuss the ways in which tradition is demonstrated, staged and understood in Kosova restaurants. After the 1999 war in Kosova, restaurants emerged as new places, privately public and publicly private, that display local aspirations and intentions to re-invent the roots of tradition and construct routes to Europe. In addition, they illustrate the intention to modernise, and provide routines for social life and conviviality. Within the context of gastronationalism and culinary diversity, I use local language derived concepts such as *katunopia* and *sofraisation* to argue that Kosova gastronomy is undergoing continuous change and transformation characterised by a process of searching, combining, inventing and re-vitalising 'tradition' to build a new culinary identity.

KEYWORDS: Kosova • restaurants • tradition • gastronationalism • culinary diversity

INTRODUCTION

In post-war Kosova,[1] restaurants and cafés have mushroomed. A new topography of eating out places has been introduced, old tradicional *gjellëtore* (stew eateries) have survived but are being revitalised and socialist restaurants have been replaced by new tavernas, bistros, lounges, cafés, fast food counters, takeaways, restaurant grills, and other eating and drinking places. These changes in the public gastronomic landscape reflect the recent political, economic and social changes. Social and cultural identities are produced, reproduced, contested and negotiated in the constant dynamics of everyday life, which also takes place in restaurants, the publicly private and privately public third places in the public sphere of Kosova.

In contrast to cafés, which are usually associated with vibrant daily informality, frivolity and assertiveness, a new type of 'traditional restaurant' has emerged representing a special catering category in which food is served in a specifically designed "diorama" (Finkelstein 1989) in the spirit of an "ethnoscape" (Appadurai 1996), displaying iconic objects, paintings and artefacts which serve as props in "staging authenticity"

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(MacCannel 1973), the "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983) and the "revitalisation of traditional culture" (Turgeon and Pastinelli 2002). In these restaurants, a specific set of what is considered 'traditional culture' is selected, displayed and consumed, as an often deliberate and salient mode of identification with national culture. Yet, what is considered traditional culture is often a negotiated interpretation. Not only the folk-themed restaurants serving 'authentic' Kosovar food, but also the multi-themed tavernas, designed to reflect the regional, socialist and Western iconic signs, brands and cultural elements, are competing to be perceived and promoted as traditional restaurants. However, what are considered traditional ideas, forms, things and practices play an essential part in the constitution of local traditional cuisine and traditional restaurants, which in turn lead to new ways of performing tradition and identity. In Kosova, it appears that every eating venue is competing for hegemony in the battle of tradition.

Recent research shows that, in general, cultural and social identities in Kosova are constructed and shaped through a constant process of change, negotiation, and performance (Krasniqi 2014; Luci 2014; Canolli 2017). In attempting to keep up with the changes, restaurants and cafés became quintessential models of negotiation between common discourse categories including 'tradition' and 'modernity', 'local' and 'global', 'ours' and 'theirs', 'European' and 'Oriental'. More than anything, restaurants served as stages to display, invent, celebrate, perform and consume tradition in order to legitimise and perform identity.

Food is one of the key markers of identity. Food is used as a prop in staging tradition and heritage when constructing, performing and claiming identity; food and cuisine are argued as being salient vehicles for branding national identity (Pilcher 1996; Wilk 2006; Karaosmanoglu 2007; Ayora-Diaz 2012; Võsu and Kannike 2012). Compared to the overall landscape of the "imagined community" (Anderson 1983), food can be argued as one of those sites that most embodies the feeling of home and belonging. In recent times food has been designated as heritage, gaining "greater emotional weight" (Di Giovine and Brulotte 2014: 2). Yet, it also argued that food heritage has already shifted into "commodity heritage" (Grasseni 2005), and has become a "political artifact" as well as a "tourist artifact" (Mintz 2003). The rise of restaurants as food venues has contributed to the rise of local, regional, and national culinary identities (Beriss and Sutton 2007; Neuburger 2017; Shkodrova 2019). As is the case with food in general, restaurants serve as unofficial public "institutions" in construction of a national identity from below and often become agents in "gastronationalism" (DeSoucey 2010; Ichijo and Ranta 2016; Leer 2019; Shkodrova 2019).

Tradition is constantly invented, reinvented and revitalised in the context of nation building, nation branding and national legitimation. In discussing how nation is produced and reproduced by ordinary people, Jonathan Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008) talk about four areas of everyday nationhood: "choosing the nation", "talking the nation", "performing the nation", and "consuming the nation". Michael Billig (1995) introduced the term "banal nationalism" to argue more precisely how the nation is performed and showcased in everyday contexts. However, when discussing what type of food (and in what type of setting, we might add) is symbolically promoted and consumed as Kosovar national and/or traditional food, and how interpretation is built around it, there is not doubt that the ethno-symbolic line of nation building prevails, as

argued by Anthony Smith (1991). Therefore, when discussing nationality and nationhood in local everyday life, especially in the specific context of food and cuisine, we ought to take into account how tradition is foregrounded, invented, negotiated and reproduced as a source of heritage, legitimacy and promotion. The main question guiding this essay is how tradition is being staged, negotiated, invented and performed in local traditional restaurants in Kosova, and to what extent this process construct and promotes cultural and national identities in everyday life.

In an attempt to standardise Kosova cuisine identity, various iconic dishes have been chosen from different regions to make whole the mosaic of Kosovar cuisine. Although the idea of Kosova as a nation is not fully embraced in the local understanding, mainly due to political historical consciousness, local people constantly discuss Kosovar identity in terms of territorial and cultural identity. When local people talk about nation, they have a utopian image of a unified Albanian nation, and given their history of repression under Yugoslav and Serbian regimes (Malcolm 1998; Clark 2000), that image still has strong values in local understanding. Thus, for Albanians, who are the majority of population, Kosovar cultural and ethnic identity is imagined as an Albanian identity, rather as a new Kosovar civic identity. However, at least in the context of restaurants, since Kosova independence in 2008, attitudes have shifted and there is a constant search for local and regional Kosovar foods and food practices to construct a specific Kosovar culinary identity. The local and regional foods of yesterday are climbing to the level of national food today. On the other hand, aspirations to mimic and appropriate modern and 'foreign' ways of cooking, mixing and re-branding are common in the new gastronomic field in Kosova.

This essay is based on participant observation research conducted between 2011 and 2014 in several restaurants in Prishtina, capital city of Kosova.[2] The main research site, the evidence from which is used here, is the Liburnia restaurant. Other 'traditional' restaurants were also observed and are analysed to complement the argument presented. The Liburnia offers traditional cuisine in a traditional setting designed and decorated to 'authenticate' the Kosovar eating experience. It highlights local cuisine culture for local Kosovars but also for returning diaspora, internationals working and living in Prishtina, and tourists and travellers. The restaurant opened in 2006 in Meto Bajraktari Street in Prishtina Old Town. Through evidence gathered and analysed from observation of the social and culinary aspects of the restaurant experience, I draw conclusions about how tradition is negotiated, selected and performed within the context of an increasingly standardised Kosova cuisine and gastronomy.

FOOD, GASTRONATIONALISM AND CULIDIVERSITY

In his study of nationalism in an everyday context, Billig (1995) maintains that the reason we do not forget nationalism is that it is ordinary and banal. It is practiced and produced in everyday contexts. Most of the time it is taken for granted and not deliberated. In relation to flag waving, Billig (ibid.: 7–8) asserts that it is the flag hanging unnoticed outside, and not the one waved in commemoration, that "constitutes the ordinary banal nationalism". British anthropologist Chris Tilley (2008) argues that Billig makes a good

point but that he does not consider material culture. Billig's discussion is confined to discursive means and not material objects. In his own reflection of gardens in Norway and England, Tilley (ibid.: 223) reflects on banal nationalism as objectified in gardens and, according to him, "how people think about and understand gardens, produces and reproduces the nation through their normative understandings of what gardens mean to themselves and others".

Global research evidence provides arguments that food, cuisine and restaurants are all tools for and sites of national identity expression (Cusack 2000; MacClancy 2007; Ayora-Diaz 2012). Authenticity and exoticism have become essential claims for food products and cuisine in the global market. Thus, the importance of national signifiers has increased significantly in recent years, spawning what Michaela DeSoucey (2010) calls gastronationalism. Gastronationalism describes nation-making practices that use food as a medium for expressing ideas of collective belonging and distinction. DeSoucey uses examples from France and the way in which French food, as a result of the globalisation of food markets, becomes a powerful tool of state institutions and other factors engaged in nationalism. In her essay on gastronationalism in Lithuania, Diana Mincyte (2011) recognises the forces that use food, in her case the traditional Lithuanian 'zeppelin', to imagine the nation in different historical times. Mincyte argues that concepts and markings such as lack of civilisation or underdevelopment have played a crucial role in the production of national subjectivities and claims to modernity. She also states that they have manifested themselves in the culinary culture of Lithuania.

Researchers have started investigating and showing how nation, heritage and identity are constantly intertwined into gastronomy and culinary politics, transforming nation states (Ichijo and Ranta 2016). National branding with food is considered a soft form of diplomatic power, termed 'culinary diplomacy' (Chapple-Sokol 2013) and 'gastrodiplomacy' (Porciani 2019). As Ilaria Porciani shows, the efforts to brand a nation, locally and internationally, are mainly made by local restaurant chefs, in association with government agencies, as is the case in Denmark (Tholstrup Hermansen 2012).

On the other hand, nation states, regions and other entities use their concept of culinary diversity as a model of their culinary identity. Diversity is often understood in relation to various foods used as part of a unified cuisine. Thus, culinary diversity is often embedded within the concept of national culinary identity, but it can also be expanded to regional culinary identity, mainly associated with certain geographical and ecological realities. Richard Wilk (2006) suggests that culidiversity in Belize is fuelled by diaspora migrants, tourists, and the local response to them. He shows how tourism and globalisation in general generate locality. Belizeans, for example, are constantly searching for ways to display their authenticity to themselves, to their diaspora migrants, and to tourists. Similarly, Elise Billiard (2006) shows how restaurants play a crucial role in the reinvention of tradition in Maltese food culture by reproducing a romantic view of Mediterranean life and village life, while Stephan Ayora-Diaz (2012) shows how restaurants play the same role in framing Yucatecan cuisine. Furthermore, culinary principles that were considered fundamental to Cantonese cuisine were ordered and classified mainly because imported principles, especially "outside flavours" that connoted a different cultural identity and social hierarchy, had found their way into the local cuisine (Klein 2009). Other studies show that Turkish high-end restaurants are constantly engaged in

the preservation of taste by means of the re-creation of Ottoman dishes whereas taverns maintain taste memory in middle-class settings (Karaosmanoglu 2009).

In the general social context, restaurants are sites and modes of experience forming "a bustling microcosm of social and symbolic processes focused on the formation and maintenance of identities in the context of highly sensory environment" (Beriss and Sutton 2007: 3). Anthropologists and other social scientists argue that restaurants play a crucial role in developing and instituting the ethos that underpins the culinary experience. Gradually, through a process of repetition and standardisation of production and consumption, including codes of waiting and eating, a set of norms that contribute to the construction of territorialised gastronomy is defined (Spang 2000; Trubek 2000; Ayora-Diaz 2012). Restaurants are places that engage entrepreneurs and chefs to think creatively about developing new dishes and menus and elaborating new cuisines to compete in public foodscapes. Some of the "most interesting aspects of social and cultural life in our contemporary world are featured in restaurants" (Beriss and Sutton 2007: 1). Although the organisations of relations within restaurants are framed by the market, the relations reflect aspects of social and cultural life that include tradition, kinship and gender, and restaurants as "hospitality commercial spaces" (Lugosi 2008).

Restaurants are also good arenas to investigate banal gastronationalism. Almost everywhere in the world, 'ethnic' and 'traditional' restaurants display iconic objects, paintings, photos, and material that reflect certain modes of identification: family, region, city, and nation. In post-war Kosova, restaurants were constructed as ethnoscapes (Appadurai 1996; Kadriu 2009). They represent, in fact, the objectification of ethnic katunopia (a term I discuss below) where national costumes, flags, maps showing Albanian territories and Albanian cultural signs are displayed. In my observation, dishes such as Scanderbeg steak, Illyrian salad (replacing Greek salad) are common and widely displayed in new restaurants. Kosovars highlight and illustrate their cultural baggage in order to reproduce and nurture ideas and feelings of ethnic and national belonging.

In 2012, I came across the Kruja restaurant near the town of Ferizaj in Kosova. Here the whole restaurant was built, designed and decorated to celebrate Scanderbeg (1405–1468), the Albanian medieval hero who fought and defeated the Ottomans. Kruja is the name of the city in Albania where Scanderbeg fought decisive battles against the large Ottoman armies led by the sultans themselves. In Kruja, I spotted a dish called Scanderbeg's sword. To appease my curious anthropological bent, I ordered the dish and received a shish-kebab type of meal served with rice and peppers. According to the waiter, the chef had created this house specialty to reflect the overall theme and philosophy of the restaurant. Even though the dish was, unfortunately, tasteless and undercooked, two of the customers sitting at the next table, a family from the diaspora, ordered it too. The father, whom I asked what he thought of the dish, said that it was not extraordinary but that he wanted to enjoy an Albanian dish he "can't get abroad". In over 100 Kosova restaurant menus that I consulted, a "Scanderbeg" something or other dish was included and presented as the restaurant's traditional or Albanian dish. These dishes were invariably featured in the local or national section of the menu.

Photo 1. The Kruja restaurant in Ferizaj. Photo by the author, 2013.

Photo 2. Scanderbeg Sword on the Kruja menu. Photo by the author, 2013.

Photo 3. Scanderbeg Sword or Shish Kebab in Kruja. Photo by the author, 2013.

In the Liburnia restaurant in Prishtina, half of the dishes served on the menu are not traditionally eaten in Kosova although in neighbouring Albania they are very familiar. For example, dishes such as *tavë Elbasani*[3] may be found in some restaurants. These dishes represent what is called the national mosaic and are typical of dishes now found in all Kosova Albanian regions and towns. Which dish appears on the menu varies from restaurant to restaurant as menus are not fixed and each restaurant designs its own version of Kosova cuisine. In the words of Shaip, one of the chefs, "You have to mix both, international and local dishes. People want different things at different times. Sometimes internationals come here for local food, sometimes they just want pasta or pizza made in a wooden oven." (FM: 2012) Similarly, Luli, the head chef at Liburnia, suggests that because Kosova food itself has changed since the war, restaurants have to adapt. According to him, because traditional dishes are in high demand, the restaurant must make a wide range of traditional specialties available, but it must also offer what he calls "international dishes" because his guests are very diverse and make different and varied requests. He states this diplomatically: "We are not limited to just our traditional dishes, because we have a lot of guests in our country who sometimes want their familiar food too."

In a conversation shared with a customer, Dalip, one of the waiters at Liburnia, expressed the ethos of the restaurant in these terms:

> We are a traditional restaurant and we prepare most of the traditional dishes you can find in Kosova, even things that are not on the menu. Our chefs are experienced

> and can do anything. But we also do modern food… We like to be traditional but in a modern way. (FM: 2012)

When I asked him what modernity meant to him, he answered with references to Europe. Accordingly, modernity is understood and experienced as all things European which, in turn, implies a transcendence of archaic tradition. Modernity, in this way, suggests careful organisation and design and promises a roadmap to Europe.

Kosova restaurants have accepted culinary diversity as a norm of the sought-after modernity. Culinary diversity in traditional restaurants is understood as "many variants coming together" and as the "local mosaic of dishes". Often, traditional dishes are aestheticised and re-presented to guests in ways which are seemingly different from local culinary principles. For example, the *tavolina suedeze* (Swedish table or *smorgasbord*) became a norm in many restaurants in Kosova, including Liburnia. Most parties organised in Liburnia were organised using the principle of distributing a range of dishes at various large tables from where guests could make individual choices. Other examples are also significant. Many international dishes are appropriated for local cuisines and menus are often separated into an international and a local section. Local is a version of, and used interchangeably with, labels that include 'regional', 'national', 'traditional' or 'Kosova'. The international menu is often made up of dishes, or rather names of dishes that signal Italian and French, but also Mexican and Indian inspiration. For example, chicken curry (Indian) may be offered together with Chateaubriand (French) and fajitas (Mexican).

In the Balkan context, the study of food is neglected as a topic of social science research, and only a few research articles can be identified. Analysing the role of food in the formation of Balkan cultural identity, Evgenia Krašteva-Blagoeva (2008) undertook research in different ethnic traditional restaurants in Sofia, Bulgaria. Her attempt was to see if cultural proximity overcomes national rivalries and the symbolic construction of region and regional identity. It is interesting to note that in Bulgaria intellectuals do not like the *kafana* music played in Serbian restaurants mainly because of the Serbian language. They consider the Serbian language a "peasant language" (ibid.: 29). Serbian restaurants and other Greek-Lebanese restaurants in Bulgaria are characterised by their appropriation of dance and live music, whereas in Turkish restaurants only Turkish music is played and they mainly focus on "providing perfect culinary experiences" (ibid.). According to Alexander Kiossev (2002: 167), cuisine is one of the main shared characteristics in the Balkans: "dining in a Greek restaurant means dining 'at home', only there you will get the food that [you] are used to, if sometimes under a different name". In her comment about whether there is such a thing as a Balkan cuisine, Cristina Bradatan (2003: 49) said:

> if we talk about 'haute cuisine', the cuisine to be enjoyed in restaurants, there is some truth in claiming the existence of a Balkan cuisine. Sarmale, baklava, musaka, Feta cheese, halva, may be under different names, but with similar tastes are some of the Balkan meals being usually served in a Greek, Romanian or Bulgarian restaurant, in New York or in any other big city, and they are recognized as parts of the 'Balkan cuisine'.

The research focus on Kosova has concentrated mainly on grand political themes of intervention, state building, consociational democracy, and so on (Weller 2009; Landau

2017; Beha 2019). Recently, the focus has shifted and, employing a bottom-up approach, is becoming more anthropological. The focus today is on commonalities and concentrates on eliciting the meaning of social relations as practiced in the context of daily life and identity negotiation (Krasniqi 2014; Luci 2014; Canolli 2017; Latifi 2018; 2019; Schwandner-Sievers and Klinkner 2019). Although food is not a common subject of research, there are several studies highlighting the importance of examining food culture in Kosova as another way to discuss social relationships and objectifications of identity building in the everyday context (Kadriu 2009; Canolli 2017; 2018). It is evident that food has only recently appeared in the ethnography notebooks of anthropologists who research post socialist Eastern European as well as South Eastern European countries (Caldwell 2007; 2009; Metzo 2009; Mincite 2011; Shectman 2009; Neuburger 2017; Shkodrova 2019). As Nestle (2009: xi) argues, "when you study food, you get to the heart (the stomach, really) of the Europeanisation of former Soviet-bloc countries".

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

Kosovars have manifold relationships with their past. Although there are tendencies toward a re-traditionalisation in the everyday context in Albania, as asserted by Douglas Saltmarshe (2001), and in Kosova by Lumnije Kadriu (2009) and Nita Luci (2014), the spectre of enduring relationships with the past is extensive, layered and complicated. As I have come to understand in my ethnography, Kosovars express concern and ambivalence towards both 'tradition' and 'modernity'. These duelling aspirations, that is to modernise but also to traditionalise, are central to Kosova cuisine and gastronomy in general. This is seen in the way in which it is constructed, combined, presented, aestheticised, standardised, territorialised and de-territorialised at the same time. Despite the tendency to display *roots* in the re-traditionalisation process, chefs, restauranteurs, waiters, and the catering industry in general, also attempt to represent restaurants as *routes* to European integration, globalisation, and to what is defined as modernity. At the same time, *routines* of eating and drinking out are articulated as post-war Kosova society attempts to create the normalcy and civility that is associated with freedom, play and leisure. "To have a normal life" is the prototypical quest of local people in Kosova. However, Kosovars are "constantly negotiating between 'roots', 'routes' and 'routines' as strategies for coping with a shifting cultural landscape" (Canolli 2017: 298).

Kosova's pasts may be categorised as follows: the ancient past, the medieval past, the Ottoman past, and the socialist past. However, the past is also understood as the spatial past. Thus, it is common to hear local people refer to *katun* ('village') past or/and tradition and *sheher* ('town') past. These categories of past may overlap, both in practice and discourse, to legitimise current identities. Often, tradition is mythologised and perceived as ahistorical. For example, among Kosovars today arguments that trace current practices to the ancient past have a sentimental value attached to them. The arguments are based mainly on the linguistic and historical sources that identify Kosova as the continuous territorial and linguistic identity of Dardania (Mirdita 1978; Stipčević 1980; Wilkes 1995; Malcolm 1998; Shukriu 2004). Canolli (2017: 291) also says that,

> There is no available evidence that allows us to accurately analyze or describe the food culture of ancient times and findings of contemporary research re an insuf-

ficient basis for strong historical claims regarding culinary continuity. However, the idea of discovering a "Dardanian diet" appears to have sentimental appeal to Kosovar Albanians today.

Although there is no succinct historical evidence to provide us with a more vivid view of food culture in the Balkans during the Ottoman reign, there is evidence that acknowledges the influence of Ottoman terminology and practice. However, we ought to omit the Ottoman-centric view of Balkan cuisines as a monolithic view, neglecting the agency of local culinary and cuisine-making traditions and practices. During socialism, in an attempt to break with the Ottoman legacy, Balkan cultures excavate beneath the Ottoman past to identify authentic signs that illustrate the origin and provide the model to reconstruct an original way of life (Todorova 1996; Neuburger 2004; 2017). But these attempts are complicated by the fact that "food culture during socialism in Kosova was split between the progressive/socialist attempts to modernise food production and consumption along the lines of Yugoslav cuisine, and local efforts to preserve traditional nutritional practices" (Canolli 2017: 292). Inevitably, some modern food products influenced village home cooking, and vice-versa. The Yugoslav seasoning cult product called Vegeta is one example. This seasoning, made of a mix of vegetables and monosodium glutamate (MSG), was consumed country-wide to "flavour up the unity and brotherhood" among the peoples of Yugoslavia (ibid.). However, Wendy Bracewell (2012) points out that the Yugoslav cookbooks were designed to celebrate preferred (mainly Serb) national cuisine dishes in the mosaic of Yugoslav cuisine.

Photo 4. Preparing fli *outdoors. Photo by the author, 2014.*

Restaurants are key sites in the standardisation of what can be called Kosova cuisine. Iconic homemade dishes such as *fli*[4] and *tavë* are presented as typical, special, autochthonous and traditional Kosova food and hailed as core dishes in a Kosova cuisine that is being modelled and constructed upon the premise of a revitalisation of homemade food.[5] Kosova cuisine is an open and inclusive roundtable that attempts to harmonise the traditional centre with the diverse periphery.

> What can be called the Kosova cuisine is objectified in a complex process of territorialising, nationalising, de-territorialising, traditionalising, modernising, mimicking and diversifying food, taste, hospitable setting and experience (Canolli 2017: 293).

Thus, in restaurants in Kosova, tradition is handed down as familial practice rather than as an outcome of historical research. Below I provide a descriptive scene of how tradition was performed and interpreted in a restaurant scene in Prishtina.

Photo 5. A special Liburnia dish called tavë Liburnia. *Photo by the author, 2013.*

On one occasion a table of four customers ordered *tavë Liburnia*, but requested that less oil than usual be used, and asked for traditional *tavë Gjakove*. One of the guests remembered that on her last visit she had a *tavë Gjakove* as recommended to her by one of the waiters. She had been here with a group of international colleagues who were keen to taste authentic food from Kosova. Then she asked the waiter about the chef's background and when she was informed that one of the Liburnia chefs came originally from Gjakova, a town in west of Kosova, she wanted to order *tavë Gjakove* for her guests. To her surprise she liked the *tavë Gjakove* made especially for them and returned with her husband and another couple for the same dish. She had mentioned that it had peeled peppers and was very tasty. She asked for the same *tavë* without meat but with peppers. Dalip, one of the waiters, went to the kitchen to discuss it with Hanife, the head chef, who looked out of the kitchen door and recognised the table of four. She then started to make the dish but advised the waiter that it would take probably around 60 minutes for the whole thing. Hanife was happy that the *tavë* she made was requested by the guest. She turned to me saying, "good tradition doesn't disappear" (FM: 2012).

According to the guests who asked for *tavë Gjakove*, dining out in restaurants is all about tasting "real traditional food", which they cannot cook at home. Touching the *tavë* clay pot, and pointing to the restaurant wooden oven, one of the guests mentioned that "this is how tradition works, it bakes in you like the crispy part of the *tavë* and doesn't let you go" (FM: 2012). All of the guests nodded to this claim and extended their remarks about how traditional food tastes good when it is made with *katun* ingredients such as fresh vegetables. When I asked about best *tavë*-making restaurant in Kosova, one of the guests advised me to go to Gjakova and Prizren, towns in the west of Kosova, to taste real *tavë*, while others said that it depends entirely on the chef, since according to them, even some places in Gjakova and Prizren have modified the way they serve *tavë*.

Guest 1 (male): It is about the determination of the owner or chef to keep the taste. If they want to keep the taste as it was before then they are traditional, but if they experiment with taste then the dishes may be tasty but they are not necessarily traditional […] Nowadays everyone claims to be traditional, but it is not that easy to be traditional either…

Guest 2 (male): Tradition is not just throwing food in a pot. Tradition has its order.

Guest 3 (female): Of course […] but now it is fashionable to modify and adapt tradition to suit modern ways. Taste is also changing. You know how long it takes to develop the taste of this *tavë* […] how many grandmothers have burnt themselves bringing this taste about […] Now every chef changes things as he wants them and calls them as he wants them.

Guest 2 [complaining]: We have no tradition to keep the tradition, we have no education, no culture!

Guest 1: Yes, yes, you cannot display tradition just like that […] you have to peel it off, you have to keep up with time. Nowadays, the whole world is doing it, in order to save tradition. You must modernise it, you must peel it off a bit, you must know how to put it in modern forms.

Guest 4 (female): Nowadays they are not peeling it but everyone is grafting tradition as they want. Various things have entered here. What can you do? (FM: 2012)

This encounter between guests in Liburnia is quite representative of the debate about traditional culture, which is almost entirely conceived by Kosovars as being folk culture, as performed in the old times. Kosovars seek to experience and perform tradition as reformed and re-presented in light of national, transnational and international pathways that lead to the necessary modernisation process. They claim that tradition must be re-modelled, and use the metaphor of peeling to describe the way it ought to function. Accordingly, tradition needs peeling for two reasons: to get to the pure substance and to rid it of the dirt and rot. Other metaphors are also used in relation to the revitalisation of tradition. Pruning tradition (*me krasit traditën*) and grafting tradition (*me shartu traditën*) are also used, often to describe a process of changing and re-modelling of traditional ideas, practices and materialities.

Yet our guests performed their understanding of how tradition should be re-presented in their choice of dish. They ordered *tavë*, cooked by Hanife, and salad with Sharr cheese. Sharr cheese is cheese from the Sharr Mountains, distinctive in its taste and in the traditional way it is made. They also ordered bruschetta made in the oven and zucchini with hot sauce. For them this was a traditional dinner, tasting traditional dishes such as *tavë* and regional ingredients embodying the taste of a local place. The bruschetta and zucchini supplemented the core of their *sofra* (a low round wooden dining table) as they put it.

After several complaints about the lack of tradition and lack of professionalism in order to peel the tradition and present it in a new form and keep up with current global/modern influences, our *mysafir* turned to another perspective, the local way of looking at things, usually in the spirit of dialectical apology for the state of affairs in their lifeworlds.

Guest 3: When you turn it over and examine the other side, something has started to develop, to get in order. People are inspired from abroad, they are copying things, mixing things, a little bit here and there, and it is not that bad… considering the war, considering we are a new state, somehow there is a vitality and buzz…

Guest 2: Well, something has developed, but we have somehow quickly changed. Modernity is coming quickly. We have no tradition to meet it and maintain things as they do in Europe. They maintain tradition and modernity as they please. Here everyone just wants to eat and grab [meaning the country, the community or society].

Guest 4: Well, this is how it goes, slowly. Maybe one day we will not be as greedy as we are now, maybe we will learn one day. We won't wait for that day but our children or maybe grandchildren will wait for it. But when you look at it from this side, people have returned from abroad, have invested their money and something has developed here.

Guest 3: [after speaking about children and their future she addressed me]: In the past we couldn't get out that much, either to pick and choose dishes like now, or to eat in a restaurant. All that was there, it was done at home. There weren't two or three restaurants in the whole of Prishtina. And those from the Committee went there. Women stayed at home. Now we're choosing tradition and modernity and it is good enough. This is how things come and go. They all come to be…

Guest 1: Those who got out of here and saw how things happened abroad… peeled themselves off and brought things from abroad. This has enabled things to happen, otherwise we had nothing in the past. If it wasn't for 'abroadness' we would be left with nothing. (FM: 2012)

This conversation illustrates the Kosovars' experience of dining out in relation to their changing social lives. Those changes are perceived as ruptures and continuities between a traditional static past and dynamic modern present. Through the metaphor of peeling, people describe how identity is constructed like the layers of the onion. Peeled is a common metaphor for describing a person who is cultured. Someone who is peeled is supposed to present themselves as re-modelled, as someone who has got rid of the old ways. They must have good manners and be in control of themselves in front of others. Usually those who have experienced 'civilisation' in Europe are considered to be peeled, which in turn means that they have got rid of their stereotypical judgements. The assumption is that they must have peeled off layers of their 'archaic' manners and have appropriated manners and ways of 'civilised' Europe. Sometimes the word peeled is used interchangeably with the words *i dalun* (one who has been abroad, who has travelled and appropriated global manners). This expression, and *jashtja* ('abroadness') are used as words that express an aspired identity. In the local terms, those who have lived, worked and been educated abroad have enabled the process of modernisation, which is ultimately the path to the civilised world, mainly associated with Western Europe.

As the example above shows, there is a dialectical approach to tradition: critical and apologetic. Kosovars express self-criticism about the presentation of culture as well as excessive consumption. There is a consistent struggle for hegemony between differ-

ent practices, ideas and materialities, categorised locally in terms of banal nationalism, turbo folk, static archaism, *kullerizëm* (from English 'coolness') and *jashtja*. Yet it is commonly maintained that only those who are 'peeled' have the sense of the right measure in peeling the traditional culture to re-present and represent it to the world, and to Kosovars themselves as a people who constantly aspire to new experiences of tradition in light of global flows. Using food, landscape and gardening metaphors, Kosovars attempt to categorise their position on the road to modernisation and civilisation.

SOFRAISATION AND KATUNOPIA

Prishtina restaurants such as Liburnia, Tiffany, Dardha, and Sofrabezi are influenced by regional culinary traditions, mainly as an outcome of the origins of the chefs and owners, but also because of the local, transnational and international demand for local and authentic food, which, in turn, is linked to regional culinary traditions. This suggests that cuisine, in its social milieu, is more regional than national (Mintz 1996), and that regional distinctiveness competes at the national level for the territorialisation of a country's cuisine, as discussed by Arjun Appadurai (1988).

Kosova restaurants use iconic cultural resources to create a culinary particularity and to promote it as traditional culture, sometimes even as a representative of national culture. The main challenge is to identify distinct foods, tastes, practices and etiquette that can be used to construct the style and distinctiveness of local and traditional cuisine. Guests who visit the traditional restaurants expect to experience and taste that distinctiveness. The search for authenticity is not just a tourist goal; local residents as well as returning members of the diaspora seek it too. For them, authenticity is a way of "returning to the whole" – the synesthetic whole offered in the act of eating. Most metaphors of home are expressed as taste and smell metaphors.

Luli (the owner and chef at Liburnia restaurant) responded very warmly when I commented that I felt that there was a revitalisation of different culinary traditions in his restaurant and that he seemed to be trying to create a new Kosova cuisine, or 'newborn' cuisine that manifested as a process of combining and mixing traditional Kosova cuisine with international cuisine. He acknowledged that he hopes to bring together traditional foods from all pasts, regardless of origin, and to present them as "traditionally modern" (FM: 2012). Luli views Kosova cuisine as a regional cuisine that is a component of a pan-Albanian cuisine, which is, in turn, characterised by regional diversities. He subscribes to the general idea that Kosova cuisine is essentially a large *sofra*[6] that belongs to an even larger Albanian *sofra*. He mentioned culinary diversity as the main characteristic of Albanian cuisine, which he holds to be a territorialised cuisine associated with Albanian lands. For him, culinary diversity means Albanian culinary diversity rather than inter-ethnic and cross-national diversity.

Sofra is a concept, a practice and a materiality. As a concept, *sofra* objectifies togetherness, conviviality, exclusivity, unity, as well as diversity. In the Albanian traditional folkways, noted by local ethnologists, those who give food and lay down their *sofra* are perceived to be continuing the sacred codes of hospitality, often presented as the essential characteristic of Albanianess (Halimi-Statovci 2006). *Sofra* is simultaneously open and closed, inclusive and exclusive, features local food as well as food that is 'brought

in' or novel, is both poor and rich, regional and national, historic and contemporary. It is a place of sharing and conviviality, a centripetal body that adds new, innovative dishes to distinct conventional ones. In the domestic culinary sphere of Kosova, this is epitomised by the practice of setting *sofra* with *fli* at its centre.

The restaurant practice of expanding and diversifying food choices is a continuous process of exploration, innovation, permutation, diversification and is, what I call, the *sofraisation* of Kosova cuisine. It embodies the competing practices of traditionalising, territorialising and de-territorialising Kosova cuisine in traditional restaurants. The Ottoman, socialist and European culinary cultures are supplemented, re-invented and merged to construct a new and transformed Kosova cuisine. Through the inclusion and reappearance of certain dishes and the omission of others, Kosova traditional restaurants play a major role in the sofraisation of Kosova cuisine. Iconic dishes from the domestic urban and rural culinary spheres are considered base or roots (*taban*) of local tradition. Factors including the chef's background and experience with European culinary culture, the imitation and reinvention of other cuisines, and the perceived or real response of the restaurant's clientele to the dishes served, may affect the way these iconic dishes are prepared as Kosova restauranteurs try to institute and standardise Kosova cuisine. Thus, sofraisation is a conscious selection from a multi-layered culinary heritage, re-presented and combined in new forms and practices, with the intention of constructing an idiosyncratic Kosova cuisine. The emerging gastronomic landscape of Kosova reflects this purpose and can be argued to be the model of culinary and gastronomic culture upon which the new Kosova cuisine is based.

There are many factors that have affected the standardisation of Kosova gastronomy in local traditional restaurants. One of the crucial factors is the role of chefs, notably chefs with experience in European restaurants, but also chefs with experience in the gastronomic and tourist industries in the socialist period. Luli from Liburnia is an example of a chef who returned with culinary skills acquired abroad. He learned his skills in Opatia, a Croatian town where he went to study painting before the break up of Yugoslavia and where he worked in the hotel industry. Several times, Luli emphasised that chefs in Opatia were all educated in culinary colleges and cooked professionally. He referred to degustation as being essentially the art of eating well, and claimed that he learned this during his time there. However, Luli's inspiration also derives from his experience as a *gjakovar* (from Gjakova, an old town in western Kosova) and his fondness for the food traditionally cooked in urban towns and the iconic dishes associated with the Albanian culinary tradition. Using recipes inherited from his grandmother, he learned to cook dishes that he ate and enjoyed as a child. Drawing on his experience in Opatia, he explored mixing different flavours and ingredients. For Luli, the idea of new is essentially a fusion of the two encounters with food. For him, new is mainly understood as mixing and combining ingredients and dishes rather than inventing or creating dishes, spices and sauces.

Restaurants are also dioramas (Finkelstein 1989) constructed to signify particular meanings for those who dine there. In Kosova, spaces are decorated with artefacts and traditional objects, mainly peasant tools, intended to evoke idyllic village life. The rooms are decorated to simulate the guest rooms in villages (*katun oda*) and *katun* culinary lifeworld, and have become key attractions for those who are nostalgic for the idealised *katun* experience. Restaurants are often perceived as places to escape from the

common view of the city, which is as 'swamped' by rubbish and people, where parks and places to spend leisure time are sadly missing. Restaurants that have opened in the periphery and villages nearby attract local as well as international visitors who want to escape the city.

Thus, there is an increasing emphasis on the so-called katunopia (Canolli 2018), a utopian image of *katun* life enhanced by the availability of simple, peasant food (especially the making of the traditional *fli*), the *kulla* house (a two or three storey traditional stone house), and an invariably picturesque rural lifeworld. Katunopia is both a fantasy and an expression of urban alienation. It offers psychological consolation for urbanites and members of the diaspora; it provides an escape to nature and to traditional culture, and it suggests a return to home, a return to the place of authentic origins. This image is objectified into real life, in practice and discourse, and as a result, is constantly reproduced and consumed. It may be argued that katunopia is similar to what Appadurai called ethnoscape (1996) although katunopia is not only an ethnic site but also a means of escape from urban life and a return to a place of origin, often associated with the notion of innocence.

Katunopia is appropriated by eating in restaurants, consuming images of idyllic rural life, visiting heritage sites, and nourishing the body and soul through engagement with *katun* landscapes during summer holidays, weekends and festival days. Katunopia is a manifestation of an idealised memory and of nostalgia. It is also a brand. As ethnosites (Turgeon and Pastinelli 2002), restaurants have become part of a booming nostalgia industry (Klein 2009) and sites of gastronomic standardisation (Ayora-Diaz 2012) for the emergence of cuisine that is promoted as distinctive and as territorialised.

Albanians consume katunopia both as an invention of *katun* life experienced in the old days, and as a respite from the urban 'decadence' of the post-war urban landscapes. Here, food and setting have an important function. Phrases such as "to feed the eyes", "to purge the longing and nostalgia for the old days", and "not to forget how we were" echo in this world. Visiting members of the diaspora are agents of the objectification of katunopia in post-war Kosova and this is because it is, for them, a way of experiencing home, locality, tradition, nation and authenticity. Government and international agencies as well as local businesses all canvass katunopia as a means to promote local agricultural development, health awareness programs, and the consolidation of the new-born state of Kosova. As my informants often put it, the "state is new-born, but its people are old corn" (FM 2012).

CONCLUSION

Banal gastronationalism and culinary diversity are embodied and expressed in the practice of constructing Kosova gastronomy as it occurs in restaurants. Local identity, or a commitment to feature local cuisine, is expressed using words such as ethnic, national, regional and traditional, all of which connote a desire to highlight homemade food in the public gastronomic field. When building their menus, restaurant chefs include iconic dishes that were common within their family circles or distinctive in their local communities. Dishes from foreign cuisines are included on menus to reflect a commitment to culinary diversity.

Ethnic katunopia is constantly objectified, consumed and reproduced. Tradition is objectified in dishes, menus, service and decor in Kosova restaurants; it is performed through the process of revitalising and re-inventing local iconic dishes. The process of standardisation of Kosova gastronomy is characterised by selecting and re-presenting regional traditions as representative of national cuisine. This selection and re-presentation reflect sofraisation. Sofraisation denotes particularity, distinctiveness and sameness, as well as openness, inclusiveness and diversity. It is an evolving process of cuisine in construction, from the centre 'traditional' to the peripheric 'mix'. The process of re-presentation, modelling and multi-layered construction of Kosova cuisine extends beyond locality and region but is, nevertheless, appropriate in the sofraisation of Kosova cuisine. Repetition and standardisation characterised by this emerging mixing process make the territorialisation, de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation of Kosova cuisine possible.

Finally, as I have tried to show, maintaining tradition is linked to the process of searching, inventing, combining and re-vitalising the local and global culinary and gastronomic spheres in ongoing attempts to construct a new cuisine that emerges in the pot of local, regional, national, transnational and international contexts. Different pasts and present horizons are blurred in the synaesthetic landscape of the restaurants. Restaurants can be microcosms (Beriss and Sutton 2007) that enmesh senses, ideas, practices as well as materialities. As social sites where identities are intentionally and unintentionally banal and complex, they prove useful to the discussion of social construction in post-socialist cultures.

NOTES

1 I use the term Kosova, instead of Kosovo, adhering to local usage even when writing in English.

2 This essay also draws from my unpublished PhD dissertation (Canolli 2014).

3 *Tavë/tava* is a stew slowly cooked in a clay pot. It is made with vegetables and meat, cooked in tomato sauce or, in the case of *tavë Elbasani* or *tavë kosi*, in yogurt. Each region or town claims originality and authenticity in *tavë* cooking. The cooking of local *tavë* may be understood as entertaining the cultural and social distinctiveness of the town or region.

4 *Fli* is a dish of pancake-like pastry layered with cream and yogurt. It is served in large round trays in which the pancakes are layered in the shape of a shining sun. It takes 3–4 hours to make and is usually made outdoors using 50 cm diameter baking trays called *tepsi*, a metal dome which covers the *tepsi* called a *saç*, and a triangular stand to go over the fire. It is considered the most lavish form of hospitality a family can offer, and Kosova Albanians proudly utter the word *fli* as soon as traditional food is mentioned. (For more see Canolli 2017; 2018.)

5 If you ask any Kosova today what the traditional Kosova dish is, most would cite *fli* and *tavë*. *Fli* is understood as an ancient peasant dish, whereas *tavë*, on the other hand, is understood as an urban dish shared by most countries in the Balkans.

6 A Turkish derived word for low round wooden table, commonly used in villages across Kosova. Large *sofras* are also used by restaurants to traditionalise events, such as weddings and other family ceremonies.

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FM = Author's fieldwork materials. The materials are in the personal archive of the author.

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