

# Culinary Work at the Crossroads in Istanbul

**Abstract:** Alongside the emergence of a new breed of chefs from diverse social and culinary backgrounds in Istanbul during the last two decades, new culinary interpretations and appropriations are appearing with regard to what is signified by authenticity in culinary products and practices. Here localism unfolds as the main trend and theme. This tendency is further strengthened by the formation of a new political economy of taste in Istanbul, which is defined by a double movement. On the one hand, there is a nascent transition in culinary work from craftsmanship to a more specialized professionalism, a

process that invokes significant economic and social tensions. On the other, a new eating public is emerging, a more cosmopolitan foodie group, with more ambition, desire, and motivation to try culinary products that are out of the ordinary.

**Keywords:** culinary work, craftwork, cooks, chefs, authenticity, localism

In the mid-1990s a commercial began airing on Turkish television. It depicts a small restaurant serving “traditional” Turkish food to its customers. The customers, mostly middle-aged men, sit around tables with plastic baskets piled high with sliced bread. The cook, a big man with a mustache in a white chef’s hat and apron, serves his sizzling stews, vegetable dishes cooked in olive oil, and *kebabs*, the scene overflowing with traditional symbols. The ad also shows the impatience of the cook as he checks the clock on the wall. Then the lunch rush recedes and the owner, sitting behind the cash register, tells the cook that he can go to the kitchen and have his lunch. However, the cook replies that he has to run a few errands and hastily leaves the restaurant.

The next scene takes the viewer to the all-familiar McDonald’s restaurant with its shiny interiors, bright colors, and standard furniture. The place is crowded with people of all ages, dressed in more urban styles than those shown in the earlier scene. And amidst the symbols of modernity sits the cook, indulging in his fries and burger. There is a second surprise; the cook overhears the strong rural accent of a man ordering his food, and turns to discover none other than the small restaurant owner himself. After a brief exchange of hesitant looks, both tacitly agree to go about their business of enjoying the unbeatable taste of their hamburgers and fries. Then in the background is heard the well-known slogan in the form of a song, “There is nothing like McDonald’s!”

This ad, while contributing to and running in tandem with the tremendous popularity of McDonald’s restaurants

that were first introduced in Turkey in the late 1980s, successfully played on the sharp dichotomies of modern and traditional, provincial and urban. At the time that the ad was aired the processes of neoliberalization, begun in the 1980s, had become more and more visible in the rapidly exploding consumption sphere alongside the radical transformations in the state and in the organization of production.

Today this ad would not work at all. The hamburger market in Turkey has changed and expanded considerably since the opening of the first McDonald’s restaurant in Istanbul in 1989. The arrival of other international fast-food chains as well as the launch of several local hamburger and fast-food joints has changed the burgerscape and significantly increased the competition. These shifts in the hamburger market are part and parcel of larger and sweeping transformations in the food industry, eating-out scene, and food consumption practices and culture in Turkey. The ad also would not work today because the world of meanings that operated around rather simpler dichotomies of modern/traditional, urban/provincial has exploded, and despite the persistence of these dichotomies in ordering the practices and values of this society, they have invariably become more complex. What characterizes authentic “Turkishness” in food practices has considerably changed as well. This change not only concerns the culinary products but also the very people who prepare the food. Authenticity of food in Turkey implies, for a growing number of people today, much more than “sizzling stews, vegetable dishes cooked in olive oil, and *kebabs*” and the traditional

Turkish cook is no longer a big, mustachioed man in white chef's hat and apron.

This article explores the dynamic sphere of restaurant and food culture in Istanbul by focusing on the changing nature of culinary work. It contends that a small but burgeoning segment of culinary professionals with significantly higher educational credentials and social capital than traditional cooks and chefs heralds a fundamental change in the role of the chef: from a nameless and faceless kitchen worker to—frequently and in various combinations—cook, restaurateur, businessperson, author and researcher, media personality, celebrity and brand name, innovator or traditionalist, activist, and campaigner. Investigating this new breed of chefs from diverse social and culinary backgrounds and with varied ambitions will help to identify new interpretations and culinary appropriations with respect to what is signified by Turkishness and authenticity. The discussion will explore the emergence of new definitions of the modern shaped by the nascent emphasis that this new breed places on the localness and authenticity of their culinary products, rather than the stylized and generic modernity defined by what is predominantly Western. The questions posed in this article concern: (a) how and under what kinds of social stimuli the new breed of chefs operate as they imbue the food with their knowledge and skill; (b) where that knowledge and ability emanate from; (c) in what ways they create a performance and object that carries the particular values they desire; and (d) how they respond to the changing world of food consumption. As these are questions that are ultimately linked with ideals of taste, chefs open up a productive space for unpacking the construction and conveyance of taste. In other words, the following aims to develop a fruitful understanding of the relationships between the changing nature of culinary work and the social production and dissemination of taste in contemporary Istanbul. Studying the emerging trends, the coalescing boundaries, and the quest for novel meanings, tastes, and ingredients in Istanbul's foodscapes also can provide fresh insights when problematizing the established trends in the more dominant foodscapes of North America and Europe. This may prove particularly useful for pointing out new directions in rethinking the relationships between authenticity, globality, and late capitalist modernity in culinary work.

In-depth interviews with twenty-two chefs in Istanbul were conducted for this research. The variety of chefs represented in this study covers a large spectrum of culinary professionals who are actively shaping Istanbul's current culinary scene. They are either chef-owners—a novel category with which privileged groups of this city have come to familiarize themselves only recently—or they work for a restaurateur or corporate

restaurant group. Some are self-taught but most have been educated in Turkish and/or international culinary institutions. They include male and female chefs from Turkey, Western Europe, the Americas, and East Asia. Their restaurants are of different genres and price brackets—from fine dining to casual and from contemporary conceptual to traditional, as well as everyday eateries. All are popular with one or more segments of Istanbul's growing and increasingly diverse eating public. In addition to the interviews, the arguments in this article are also based on the authors' observations and analyses of Turkish and international culinary trends and the respective media.

### Chefing vs. Cooking

P. P. Ferguson, in her recent book, *Word of Mouth* (2014), argues that “the explosion of food talk in the past twenty-five years—in articles, blogs, and television shows, cookbooks and memoirs, films and, yes, scholarly studies” has increasingly led to a blurring of the lines between “cooking” and “chefing,” a distinction that she contends is more a matter of time, place, and mood than of absolute qualitative difference in terms of responsibilities and work that these two terms have historically signified. Food talk, according to Ferguson, conveys “the larger food world,” new gastronomical ideas and culinary practices, making them available outside of the professional sphere and “brings the chef and the cook ever closer together” (Ferguson 2015: Prologue). While the general tenets of Ferguson's argument about the blurring of the line between cooking and chefing in the present period are sound, it is important to continue to rely on such distinctions. The boundaries between cooking and chefing may be blurring in some contexts, but in a place like Istanbul the boundaries are still in the process of being drawn in foodscapes that are themselves rapidly changing. Put differently, in contemporary Istanbul the process of the differentiation of chefing from cooking is ever more complex, yet also ever more interesting precisely because it is taking place on an already complicated map. Therefore, it is important to problematize “cooking” and “chefing” not only from the vantage point of the division of labor and work hierarchy within the restaurant,<sup>1</sup> but also via the general resonances of these concepts for the larger world of culinary practices.<sup>2</sup>

Turkey has been the land of “cooks” for quite a long time. The cook (*aşçı* in Turkish, which literally translates as the person who “does” food) had always been considered no different than any other craftsman. The great majority of cooks used to start their careers at a very young age, helping the more experienced kitchen staff in nonspecialized, repetitive work including cleaning, washing, and prepping. In Turkish restaurants the *ustacılık* (apprentice) system, characterized by devotion and learning by

experience, has been the main channel of developing competency in becoming a cook. Cooks mastered their craft through observation and imitation (Batuman 2010). This is also called *alayh* in Turkish, meaning one who lacks formal training. Such training and career development usually takes years, and the cook in the traditional sense of the word is expected to specialize in producing a few dishes whose recipes and cooking techniques change only rarely. The kinds of work that lie outside of cooking but are nevertheless vital for a well-functioning restaurant—managing a budget, hiring personnel, selecting suppliers, and procuring what is needed—used to be part of the general responsibilities of the restaurant owner. Hence, until very recently and with the exception of a few fine dining establishments and hotel restaurants, professional kitchens of more mainstream, everyday eateries, i.e., the vast majority of restaurants in Turkey, were populated and operated by cooks only.

The narrow specialization that dominated the restaurant work in Istanbul for a long time was fueled by the general composition of the eating-out scene in Istanbul, which until recently had comprised a small number of strictly codified and clearly distinct restaurant types.<sup>3</sup> Traditional restaurants can be divided into five main types, differentiated by type of cuisine that is distinguished by its key ingredients, signature dishes, and prescribed (although not always strictly followed) meal sequences (cf. Belge 2001). First, probably the oldest eating-and-drinking establishments, persistently popular even today, are *meyhane*.<sup>4</sup> A typical *meyhane* meal consists of a selection from a wide but standardized array of cold, vegetarian, or fish starters that are called *meze*, followed by hot starters and mains such as grilled or fried fish, grilled meatballs, or meat.<sup>5</sup> Second, there are the *kebab* restaurants and *ocakbaşı*, where grilled meats invariably take center stage. *Mezes* support the *kebab* experience but the focus is on meat and *raki*. Third, there are those eateries specializing in only one or a few dishes including *döner*, bean stews and pilafs, meatballs, grilled liver, chicken, and milk-based desserts. Fourth, thanks to various waves of internal migration to big cities, particularly from Central and Eastern Anatolia and the Black Sea regions, numerous *pide* and *lahmacun* (Turkish pizza and Middle Eastern-style flatbread with ground meat and spices) can be found in Istanbul.<sup>6</sup> Last but not least, *esnaf lokantası*, which literally translates as tradesmen or craftsmen's inn, typifies a simple, lunchtime-only establishment that offers affordable, frequently changing home-style meals or fixed-price menus to office workers, shop assistants, and other professionals of small business without access to a canteen or corporate catering. Alongside *meyhane*, *esnaf lokantası* represents one of the oldest of Istanbul's traditional restaurant types, dating back to the nineteenth-century



FIGURE 1: A cook mans the döner grill in *Nato lokantası*, one of the last *esnaf lokantası* in the rapidly changing Karaköy neighborhood. Across the narrow street are a vegan restaurant and a chic café.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ÖZGE AÇIKKOL © 2015

Ottoman Empire. In all of the above cases, relatively limited range and the strictly defined content of meals and food products have long limited the need for wider culinary knowledge and know-how, and this narrower specialization has been one of the leading features of cooking work. In many restaurants, cooking work, rather than referring to all-round culinary skills, is divided into fields of specializations that are defined in terms of the content of meals such as *mezeci* (one who does *meze*), *tatlıcı* (one who does desserts), *pideci*, and *kebabçı*. And for a long time, there has been very little movement of cooks from one specialty field of cooking to another.

While these traditional genres of restaurants have undergone cycles of varying popularity over recent decades, they continue to claim a large share of the eating-out scene in Istanbul, as can be seen any evening in one of the city's commercial, cultural, and entertainment hubs such as Beyoğlu and Beşiktaş on the

city's European side or Kadıköy in the Asian sector. Yet, alongside the changing cultural climate of the 1980s with its widening influence of marketing, advertising, and consumption, restaurants have not only grown in number but also proliferated in kind: restaurants specializing in foreign cuisines, ethnic foods of various origins, as well as “home-style” dishes, have become increasingly popular. Both national and international fast-food chains have also established themselves in the expanding market (Chase 1994). At the upper end of the market are chain and concept restaurants, which now can be found in every district's more exclusive streets and in the food courts of an ever-growing number of shopping centers. Restaurants with generic names (and generic appearances to match) such as Kitchenette, Big Chefs, and Cookshop, and mid-range international franchises such as Shake Shack and Wagamama, not only offer extensive, all-day menus, from breakfast to dinner and after-dinner cocktails, they also serve “Asian-style” noodles *and* classic Italian pasta-dishes, Turkish *meze and* international snacks and salads, steaks, and burgers. As they dissolve the defining distinctions of the more traditional formats, these new restaurants are often referred to—by themselves and by the food industry—as “brasseries,” even though they have little in common with the classic French restaurant genre except for their all-day food service.

Besides the hybrid format of brasseries, there has been a surge in several formats novel to the Turkish and Istanbul culinary scene. Often these are local refashionings of foreign (i.e., international, ethnic) cuisines and eateries, sometimes simply a mash-up of Turkish and international culinary elements under a foreign-sounding restaurant name. Notable among them—for their sheer number as much as for the financial investment having gone into them—are steakhouses and upscale burger joints, and “ethnic” Southeast or Japanese restaurants, which frequently collapse several national cuisines into a single menu. In addition, the multifold increase in the number of four- and five-star hotels in Istanbul (due to cultural, medical, and conference tourism) has resulted in an equally sharp rise in the number of hotel restaurants (Bartu Candan and Kolluoğlu 2008). Last but not least, there is a small but increasing number of often chef-owned, independent restaurants with distinct, ambitious culinary and aesthetic agendas.

In short, compared to several decades ago, Istanbul's culinary scene is much more heterogeneous and segmented both in terms of cuisines and client base. Consequently, eating out has increasingly emerged as an arena where it is possible for the new middle classes to engage actively in lifestyle choices and more reflexive consumption practices. The dramatic rise in newcomers to the Istanbul dining scene in recent years seems to conflate most of the characteristics and distinctions



FIGURE 2: The storefront of one of many new arrivals to the Karaköy neighborhood's eating-out scene, with stylish burger restaurants now among the most popular in Istanbul.

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that we defined above in relation to the traditional eating-out scene. Furthermore, most of the newcomers to the emerging scene demand almost the complete opposite of the traditional restaurants' narrow specialization in terms of culinary know-how and skills. Whereas cooks in the more traditional restaurants need to master a rather narrowly defined set of professional skills and to do so over a long period of time, cooks in “nontraditional” environments have to face up to a more fluid, diverse range of professional demands.

Hotel restaurants and brasseries in particular are full-service eateries, i.e., they serve everything from breakfast to lunch and dinner as well as snacks and patisserie during the day. While large hotels (or hotel chains) usually have the necessary kitchen brigades to cover such all-day, all-purpose menus, as well as event catering, cooks in brasseries and noncorporate hotels need to become generalists and know a bit of everything. Needless to say, in such circumstances and with the accompanying time constraints, achieving excellence in any aspect of the craft is often unattainable.

The new genres of eateries work with products—be they convenience ingredients engineered by the Turkish or global food industry or specialties from small-scale farmers or artisan producers—that may be unfamiliar to a “traditional” or traditionally trained cook. Ingredients are subject to trends and fashions, which are increasingly difficult to navigate and make sense of, while the sheer quantity and diversity of products on offer make judgments on quality and taste challenging.<sup>7</sup> The new steakhouses are a case in point: although barbecuing meat, especially different cuts of lamb, is well anchored in the Turkish culinary tradition, charring beef poses new challenges for the cook, since beef, domestic or imported, is expensive and the prime cuts favored by Turkish eaters are unforgiving, i.e., they can quickly become tough



when handled incorrectly. Furthermore, serving meat rare is still something of a food taboo in a majority Muslim country like Turkey. Istanbul's ethnic eateries, which only rarely employ foreign cooks, use an even wider range of exotic ingredients and nontraditional techniques, which pose even more gastronomic and culinary hurdles to the professional cook.

Another challenge for professional cooks is the expanding knowledge, inclination to judgment, and often fastidious attitude of the new restaurants' clientele, be they foreign tourists or affluent Turks. Not only do customers have instant access to limitless sources of culinary know-how on products, techniques, and trends, and thus are developing a level of connoisseurship, although usually superficial but previously unheard of, they also have more varied dietary requirements due to health conditions and lifestyle choices. This again implies that cooks and, even more so, chefs in restaurants catering to such an audience need to stay abreast of such developments, which may go well beyond the immediate skills of meal preparation.

Hence, it is not surprising to see that, alongside these transformations in the eating-out scene in Istanbul, chefing is slowly but surely emerging as an increasingly popular and significant role both in the restaurant world and in the larger cultural foodscape. Istanbul's current culinary scene is particularly vibrant in terms of the breadth and the diversity of formal and collective endeavors for strengthening the reputation of the chefing profession in the public sphere. Echoing similar undertakings in various other places both in the past and the present, active occupational associations, local and international cooking fairs and competitions, and the growing number of publications about gastronomy and the culinary arts contribute to the visibility of restaurant work for the public at large.<sup>8</sup> While one might expect a burgeoning sense of belonging and the development of a collective identity among culinary professionals, especially cooks and chefs, this vibrancy in the culinary landscapes of Istanbul has at the same time produced various terrains of tensions, with novel forms of differentiation and muscle flexing becoming more prevalent among culinary pros.<sup>9</sup>

In recent years Istanbul has seen an ever-growing number of fairs and festivals dedicated to various but often overlapping aspects of gastronomy and the culinary arts. Not only do these events usually compete for the attention of one and the same professional and lay audience, they also vie for corporate sponsorship by the hospitality and adjacent industries. The more conventional events, such as the Turkish chapter of the Bocuse d'Or, held in Istanbul since the early 2000s, or the Turkish Chefs and Cooks Association, which itself consists of twenty different professional associations and regional groups,



FIGURE 3: In Bebek, an upscale neighborhood on the Bosphorus waterfront, a cook advertises for work, touting his lengthy experience, professional certifications, and knowledge of multicultural cuisines.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ZAFER YENAL © 2014

offer young chefs the opportunity to participate in professional competitions (or “cooking battles”) in front of national and international juries composed of industry veterans or celebrity chefs or to compete for places on “national teams” that move on to similar events on the international stage.

Whereas such career tracks seem most relevant and attractive to culinary talent in the high-end hotel industry, there is an alternative, but equally ambitious, scene of foundations and initiatives focusing on culinary heritage and (re)discovery. Such associations also have their own conferences, festivals, and symposia: Gastronomika, a recent but already highly popular example, is a platform that joins culinary professionals and food enthusiasts in the self-proclaimed, somewhat pompous mission to become an “interdisciplinary culinary movement that aims to reposition the rooted Anatolian cuisine domestically and internationally”; it has taken up permanent residence in one of Istanbul's most prominent art spaces and enjoys close ties to the art world and Istanbul's resourceful patrons of arts and culture.<sup>10</sup>

Although the above-mentioned cohorts in Turkey's food world do occasionally intersect and appear at each other's events, the fragmentation in terms of restaurant styles, chefs' culinary careers, and identities also can be seen in practices of professional identity-making.

## Bifurcation in the Cooking Profession

Along with transformations in the restaurant scene and the increasing public visibility of chefing, since the late 1990s cooking in general has become more a learned profession than a mastered craft. The most important sign of this trend in recent decades is the increasing number of public and private educational institutions that provide professional training in restaurant work of all kinds. While there were very few public high schools and colleges training personnel for tourism, restaurant, and catering establishments before the 1990s, now there are many.<sup>11</sup> Most of these schools are operated by the state under the name "Occupational Schools for Hospitality and Tourism Services" (*Otelcilik ve Turizm Meslek Okulları*). A significant portion of the graduates of these schools work in occupations that are related to restaurant work in different sectors of the hospitality industry; therefore, this can be taken as an index of growing interest in restaurant work among young people coming from mostly disadvantaged social backgrounds. These schools are generally located in the lower echelons of the general educational system, mostly producing blue-collar workers for different kinds of industries. What makes these schools particularly appealing for young people of poorer backgrounds is that they are free, and the related educational expenses are kept very low.

Likewise, there is the emergence and growth of private culinary schools such as the Culinary Arts Academy (*Mutfak Sanatları Akademisi*), Istanbul Culinary Institute, and Chef's Table in Istanbul. In addition to these independent cooking schools, various private universities, such as Bilgi, Kadir Has, Özyeğin, and Yeditepe, and powerful restaurant groups such as Doors are opening their own culinary schools. These cooking schools are certified institutions for educating and training culinary professionals and some of them are accredited by or associated with foreign-based culinary schools such as Le Cordon Bleu International and Kendall School of Culinary Arts. Tuition rates at these schools are high, and therefore it is difficult, if not impossible, for young people from less affluent families to pursue a culinary career of the new kind.

The differentiating educational pathways for culinary professionals are part and parcel of the nascent process of bifurcation that has been emerging within the culinary profession in Istanbul in recent years. This bifurcation proceeds along class



FIGURE 4: Culinary students (top) gather for this year's Istanbul edition of the SIRHA exhibition (*Salon International de la Restauration, de l'Hôtellerie et de l'Alimentation*). Cooks and students (bottom) in the booth of a culinary academy exhibiting at SIRHA.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ZAFER YENAL © 2015

lines.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, there are old-school cooks and graduates of state-run vocational schools who more often than not come from humble backgrounds, and the kinds of labor they provide are generic and more readily available in the restaurant sector. They are therefore more easily replaceable by others. Yet, there seems to be a continuing demand for novice cooks and kitchen personnel from state-run cooking high schools. Many think that graduates of these schools display a work ethic that often involves loyalty, devotion, and hard work. Furthermore, they also have their local and regional solidarity and support networks that they mobilize for sustained employment and career advancement. In other words, clientelism and strong local/regional solidarity networks that exist among cooks and culinary professionals from some of the provinces such as Bolu and Kastamonu appear to play an important role in the staffing decisions of restaurateurs.

On the other hand, there is a small group of chefs who come from the middle class and, more importantly, from educated

families. Their educational credentials and language competencies, which no doubt feed one another, are impressive. They have both economic and cultural capital. Many of the interviewees for this study who come from outside the *ustacılık* system have initially taken different educational paths—sociology, psychology, and fine arts, for example—before deciding to enter the culinary field. Furthermore, most of the interviewees have spent some time outside of Turkey: they either attended culinary schools or worked abroad (some did both). They have also changed their workplaces a number of times. Career progress usually runs along the vertical kitchen hierarchy, acquiring more responsibility and status as well as higher remuneration; other modes of career progress include becoming an entrepreneur and starting one's own restaurant, moving to a different type of restaurant and, rarely, switching sides within the food industry.

The following career trajectory of a young female chef in her early thirties is illustrative in this regard.<sup>13</sup> She started her academic career by studying fine arts in Turkey. After realizing fine arts was not something she wanted to pursue, she decided to go to the United States “to figure out what she wanted to do.” She had to work in restaurants in Florida to earn a living, which is when she discovered that her real passion lay in cooking. She acquired professional experience in hotels and restaurants in Turkey and, for a six-month period, in a Japanese restaurant in Norway. She was awarded a scholarship that brought her back to the United States and into the hotel management program of Cornell University. With a degree from a prestigious institution of culinary education she found a job with multi-Michelin-starred French chef Daniel Boulud's international restaurant group in New York, where she worked until her student visa expired and she felt it was time to return to Turkey. Her academic credentials and her short but colorful international experience landed her a job with the Divan Hotel group and then with the Istanbul Doors group. She worked at two of Istanbul's hotspots for stylish dining and nightlife, Vogue and Anjelique, before taking on the head chef role at the newly opened Ca d'Oro, a boutique restaurant in SALT Galata (currently under new name and ownership), the cultural platform of one of Turkey's leading banks. She recently changed sides and is now working in the research and development department of one of the global giants of the food industry.

While the number of young aspiring Turkish chefs who have the opportunity—in terms of both cultural and economic capital—to study abroad might still be rather small, their return to the Turkish restaurant scene has had a ripple effect. In terms of job prospects, it seems that top-notch education and culinary certificates, especially from institutions abroad, have become increasingly instrumental in finding

high-level jobs in the upper segments of Istanbul's hospitality industry—that is, the growing number of stylish and high-end restaurants and the kitchens of some luxury hotels. It is mostly these chefs who help define trends and inspire others. These chefs also assume a key role in Turkey's and Istanbul's culinary scene since they attract media attention and are frequently covered in culinary news (cf. Rousseau 2012).<sup>14</sup>

The young chef's career trajectory, as outlined above, also highlights how cooking has recently become a desirable profession whose prestige is increasing. As she herself stated, cooking at first was only an enjoyable pastime. Many people including her family recognized and praised her talent in cooking while she was very young, but it did not occur to her that becoming a chef could be an actual career choice. In fact, similar comments and observations were made by many of the interviewees. As one interviewee, a well-known chef-owner in Istanbul, put it:

It is becoming trendy, becoming “okay” to wear your [chef's] whites, to become a cook. Fifteen years ago it was not okay, not trendy. It was not okay that the chef comes into the restaurant from the kitchen. [Customers would insist], “I don't want to talk to the cook, I want to talk to the boss!” “I am the boss!” “No, that's not possible, get me the boss!”

Alongside the rising popularity of chefing, cultural aspects of culinary work has turned out to be more visible. It has recently become increasingly known that chefs not only labor in the kitchen and cook but also engage in intellectual and cultural work. It is now common practice for many chefs, including some of the interviewees for this article, to write cookbooks and/or newspaper columns rich with commentaries not only on contemporary gastronomical and culinary fads and fashions but also on lifestyle issues. Furthermore, some are well-known bloggers with considerable followings. The presence of bookshelves filled with food-related publications in some restaurants has no doubt contributed to the growing image of a well-versed chef with interests in culinary and intellectual matters. Moreover, as in other important metropolitan centers in the West, Istanbul currently hosts an increasing number of museums and arts centers, mostly founded and sponsored by leading corporations in Turkey. All of these venues are home to restaurants with chic designs and slick decorations, run by chefs who develop specially designed menus for their clientele, often in dialogue with contemporary food trends. All of these factors contribute to the growing association of restaurant work with cultural work.

It is also important to emphasize that this new breed of chefs is eager to express that in the act of cooking they are able to discover more about themselves and their identities, and that the act of cooking entails more than mere work. Statements heard frequently from interviewees such as “I am



looking at cooking beyond being just a job” and “I never cared about money or title” illustrate this attitude. One interviewee said that he did not care how many hours he worked because he loved to be in the kitchen, and that being in the kitchen was relaxing to him. Hence, in these narratives, immediate material needs and economic calculations do not figure as driving factors. Although all of the interviewees agree that cooking is a physically demanding job, they still talk about it as if cooking is a medium of spiritual satisfaction and joyful fulfillment of the self. There is a significant degree of romanticization and aestheticization at work in most of these narratives.

By defining their relationship with cooking as nonmaterial and aesthetic in their narratives, the new breed of chefs strives to carve out a space of distinction for themselves and discursively engages in making a novel status group with class-like characteristics within the general stratum of cooking professionals. Evoking Amy Trubek’s (2000) discussion on French chefs at the turn of the nineteenth century, it is useful to see the existing tensions among the cooking community, including the resulting elbowing among major contenders, as important signs of significant institutional transformations within the culinary field. Within this framework the aestheticization of restaurant work can be interpreted as a strategy adopted by the new generation of chefs to emphasize the elite nature of the practice of cooking, which would in turn contribute to their professional progress and authority.<sup>15</sup> One can obtain a better idea of the tensions and yearnings this tendency of elbowing entails by looking at how the new cadre of cooking professionals views the work of others who are trained through apprenticeships and who constitute the main bulk of the cooking workforce in the Turkish restaurant business.

According to some interviewees, one cannot expect great achievements from cooks trained in the system of apprenticeship because their skills develop in a limited manner. One of the interviewees described his interactions with his colleagues in the kitchen of an upscale Turkish restaurant in London, where he initially went to pursue a degree in international relations, as follows:

There were two Turkish guys, one of them 17, one of them 19. I was 26. Not a big difference but they didn’t get along with me very well. I was educated, they were not. I was very interested in all kind of foods, ingredients and stuff, eager to learn and I was able to communicate easily in English with other people. That’s why they made my job difficult.

Furthermore, some interviewees felt that cooks who come from more traditional backgrounds have limited imagination and thus cannot be creative in the kitchen. Additionally, some suggest that this leads many cooks to become less idealistic and

more practical in terms of their culinary outputs. The generalization is that Turkish restaurateurs and cooks do not take cooking seriously and instead try to cut corners: “They do not prepare something as seemingly simple as pilaf fresh every day but rather reheat yesterday’s.” Another young, internationally trained, and already well-acclaimed chef recalls one of his first career steps, in the kitchen of one of Istanbul’s large hotels, as follows:

There were the typical Turkish chefs. They did not like this job very much. They somehow do this because they have to do this. I was reading culinary books, cooking in my free time. It became my whole life.

There are others, however, who value the expertise gained through apprenticeship. Some think that “old-school cooks” provide the restaurant sector with a highly qualified labor force even though their specialization is confined to certain areas of cooking. Because their numbers are declining as the numbers of graduates of vocational high schools working in restaurants are rising, some take this as an unfortunate sign of the decreasing competence among the backstage labor force that constitutes the backbone of the restaurant industry. It is worth noting that a conscious distinction is being employed here, between the supporting role of “backstage” production and the culinary arts, which take center stage.<sup>16</sup>

What is interesting to see in all of these evaluations is the increasing symbolic and discursive distance that emerges between two groups of chefs. This distance is predicated not only on their social backgrounds but also on the quality of their culinary outputs. There are a group of chefs who define what they do in cultural and artistic terms and refer mostly to nonmaterial aspects of cooking and food. They also distinguish themselves from others in the field in terms of their upbringing and entry to the culinary field and in terms of their career trajectories. This without a doubt contributes to the growing association of cooking with more cultural and artistic practices, as previously mentioned. This emerging trend is largely supported and strengthened by the food media. Through television shows, food columns in newspapers and magazines, and food-related books of all kinds, the new image of the chef as an artist, cultural creator, and public persona enters into wider circulation.

In fact, many of the chefs interviewed explained the rising popularity of *chefing* by emphasizing the role of the food media, especially its internet varieties. For them, anyone with even the mildest interest in cooking, either professionally or at home, nowadays has free access to an ever-increasing amount of information—on products and ingredients, on cooking techniques and recipes. Not so long ago one had to source such information exclusively from cookbooks (or the family’s recipe collection), which were far less readable, less



practical, and definitely less chic than today's plethora of culinary lifestyle bibles, be they in print or online. This increased media attention has not only given chefs a new platform to promote their restaurants, their ideas, and themselves, but it has also helped to do away with the public's traditional image of the potbellied, broad-shouldered, and mustachioed (but nevertheless nameless) cook. As one interviewee suggested, "What we do has not changed all that much. But when you show how chefs work with fire, how they chop with their knives, it does look cool."

## The New Eating Public

Since the new breed of chefs seems to have disproportionate exposure to, and receive the vast share of attention from, national and international media and the food industry relative to their smaller size in the larger culinary community, it is important to understand how they conceive of their audience and how they interpret the changes in customers' expectations and tastes. Establishing the relationship between their perceptions and culinary choices can provide insight into the issue of taste and its various manifestations.

For many of the interviewed chefs, Istanbul's dining scene is still far from being as developed and vibrant as those in other metropolises (e.g., New York, Paris, London) and other smaller, but equally innovative culinary destinations (e.g., Spanish and Scandinavian cities). Some attributed this to cultural as well as socioeconomic factors, such as the absence of pairing foods with the appropriate drinks, usually wines, and the tendency to overcook almost all ingredients—vegetables, fish, and most importantly red meats—which get in the way of a full appreciation of the restaurant experience. Furthermore, they suggested that only a small segment of Istanbul's large urban population has the financial means to make eating out a pastime or to travel abroad and acquire a taste for different cuisines and novel culinary experiences.

Many of the chefs believed that a traditional sense of luxury still reigns in the restaurant world. For many of their customers, luxury and fine dining are linked mostly to exclusivity and pricey ingredients, rather than to innovative preparation and nontraditional cooking techniques. In fact, most chefs agreed that conservatism in taste and a rather intolerant stance toward unfamiliar food characterize the majority of current restaurant-goers in Istanbul. For example, an Italian chef who caters to an affluent, primarily Turkish clientele in Istanbul estimated that a great majority of his guests are not prepared to try something new. He complained that his customers do not even want to try unfamiliarly shaped pastas, and related an incident where a customer had insisted "This

pasta is not cooked!" when the pasta was served *al dente*. He also added that his menu is mostly composed of easy-to-recognize dishes from the Italian culinary canon.

This reference to conservatism in taste that emerged in many of the interviews can be interpreted as an indication of a new front of contestation over what constitutes legitimate taste. The same chefs who complained about their customers' rather reluctant attitudes toward culinary novelties also suggested that traveling internationally and the concomitant acquaintance with foreign cuisines were the most important factors contributing to openness and a more liberal, curious attitude to nontraditional food and culinary methods. This observation ties in with the phenomenon of new upper middle classes with increasingly international connections and their role in the making of a new political economy of taste in Istanbul.

There is a substantial literature that argues that alongside the growing internationalization and liberalization of Turkish economy after the 1980s, Istanbul has become an important node for global flows of commodity, finance, capital, and people.<sup>17</sup> Like most global cities in the age of neoliberal capitalism and globalization, the service sector, expanding in tandem with the culture industry, emerged as the engine driving the economy. As a result, there are now an increasing number of well-paid professionals with global connections in Istanbul and a burgeoning creative class. Included in this group are also the people who may have less economic capital, yet who are in the process of "accumulating" certain forms of cultural capital, such as university students, young professionals, and upwardly mobile/well-educated segments of the middle class. All of these help to produce a consuming public for the newly emerging boutique restaurants and cafes, fine-dining establishments, and foreign eateries. In fact, it is exactly this new eating public that interested the interviewed chefs.

The new eating public is brave and adventurous enough to try novel culinary delicacies. A younger and upwardly mobile segment of the middle class, mostly professionals and entrepreneurs, seems to constitute the backbone of this group of people who have more cosmopolitan approaches to taste.<sup>18</sup> One interviewee, a female chef in the aforementioned leading cultural center in Istanbul, confirmed these observations regarding the general social profile of the new eating public. She said that the attractiveness of her venue and the consistent quality of food and service have made hers a destination restaurant, especially the dinner service which draws an affluent crowd who also frequent other boutique restaurants in the upper price bracket in Istanbul. Daytime customers are more mixed—visitors of the adjacent museum, businesspeople, tourists, and people from the creative industries enjoy

the views over the Golden Horn. In fact, a big part of the Karaköy neighborhood, where her restaurant is located, has undergone a significant social and spatial transformation in recent years with increasing numbers of offices, galleries, and fashion boutiques. This rapidly gentrifying coastal area part has turned into a lively center of European-style cafes, restaurants, and bistro-like eateries.

So two simultaneous processes each feed the other: On the one hand, a new group of chefs desire the growth of a new eating public that would seek out and appreciate their culinary performances; on the other, a new eating public, a more liberal-minded foodie group, is emerging, with more motivation to try culinary products that are not ordinary and that have authentic qualities. This recalls Paxson's discussion of artisanal cheese making and its consumption dynamics in the United States. She argues that the artisanal cheese consumers are interested not simply in "buying a source of nutrition" but rather in "buying the adventure and pleasure of taste, the status of connoisseurship" (Paxson 2013: 154). She also demonstrates that artisanal cheese makers actively pursue strategies to endow their products with various special and authentic qualities to help them strengthen and broaden their consumer basis. The double movement explored by Paxson can be observed in Istanbul today, simultaneously shaped by new chefs and their consumers and creating its own vibrancy and contributing to the making of a new hierarchy of values and tastes in Istanbul's culinary field. This vibrant dynamic can be considered yet another contemporary example of not only how "craft forms and artisans' dispositions are forged in relation to a dynamic consumer market" but also how "craft and taste help shape each other" (ibid.). It is now important to see that the similarities between the cases of artisanal cheese making in the United States and the refashioning of culinary work are not coincidental but rather owe a great deal to structural changes implicated in global value hierarchies. In other words, these buildups concerning new value and taste hierarchies are conditioned not only by local particularities pertaining to the culinary field but also by a strong dose of globality that shapes similar evaluations in many other countries. What is interesting to emphasize here is that globality as a structuring element of taste judgments and value hierarchies in various places is predicated upon a strong sense of locality, which will be explored in the last section of this article.

### Emerging Culinary Trend: Localism

In recent decades, many have observed the rise of new global food cities as major nodes for transnational culinary flows including culinary talents, knowledge, and fashions.<sup>19</sup> Although

Istanbul may not yet be considered a culinary hotspot, nascent signs of a novel global culinary order that characterizes major food cities such as London, New York, and Tokyo are already becoming visible. The growing agency and visibility of a new generation of chefs with high international exposure and well tuned to new culinary trends is an important sign of Istanbul's emerging place on the global food map. Furthermore, a conscious distancing from gastronomic and culinary conventions and practices strictly defined in national terms is emerging as a significant culinary trend, especially among the new generation of chefs, and finds wider echoes in the food world.

Notions of "Turkishness" or "national cuisine" rarely appear in the narratives of the new generation of chefs. They focus on the local and regional sourcing and provenance of their ingredients, and regional influences on their cooking are acknowledged and emphasized. Chefs are more likely to talk about, be inspired by, and actually cook dishes from the Black Sea, Aegean, or Southeastern Anatolian regions than refer to a Turkish dish or flavor.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, seasonality is another notion that they use to distinguish their approach to cooking from other cooks. Rather than stressing the national character of their food, almost all of the interviewed chefs highlighted the importance of locally defined ways of growing, processing, and cooking food. In other words, emphasis on a geographical, seasonal, and historical sense of place is a growing culinary trend, especially in restaurants with "the chef figure" at their center (cf. Scarpato and Daniele 2003).

The emphasis on authenticity, derived from a localist approach by the new breed of chefs, can be associated with wider, global trends in the culinary field. Injecting new life into or almost entirely remaking older, slightly stale formats of eating (and drinking) out occurred in the London of the 1990s with the emergence of the first "gastropubs," which helped launch the "New British" food and has since become the playground of corporate restaurant groups; or more recently, the "bistronomique" movement in Paris has blended and rejuvenated the French brasserie and bistro formats. In fact, one of the interviewed chef-owners stated that what many new Turkish chefs are trying to do is something that is happening all over the world, be it Scandinavia, Spain, Italy, the UK, or South America:

I think it is what the whole world is doing at the moment: trying to use carefully selected local good ingredients that are in season and use them carefully and respectfully in your kitchen. I just use Turkish ingredients so I don't use balsamic vinegar or parmesan. I don't use salmon. I believe in using *hamsi* (a kind of Black Sea anchovy) and *palamut* (a small bluefish of the bonito family), pumpkin of the season, new harvest olive oils; . . . now we have the pomegranate and all that produce.

Of course, it needs to be emphasized that the scope and definition of “the local” is elusive.<sup>21</sup> It can range from signifying the whole country to indicating certain regions and even smaller localities. For example, one of the interviewed chefs who said he wanted his restaurant to be a very local restaurant with a strong “sense of place” defined locality in broad regional terms. Locating Istanbul at the crossroads of Anatolia and Europe, he said that he tried to structure his menus so that they would be “nurtured by culinary traditions and food practices of this intriguing region with all its cultural layers.” Having enlisted the help of an anthropologist who is at the same time a trained cook, this chef, according to many the first celebrity chef in Turkey, began exploring and tracing ingredients used by generations beyond national, ethnic, or religious boundaries, ranging from the Greek islands, Anatolia, and Syria to the Black Sea region as far as Georgia. He also looked at how different practices and geographies in the region were influenced by each other, such as migration to and from the Balkans and elsewhere and within Anatolia. This approach to locality as a broader concept to reflect regional and ethnic culinary variations within Turkey is a common tendency among many of the new-generation chefs. As another interviewed chef put it: “Food has no ethnicity, only geography”; he is much respected for his quest—through his restaurants’ food and in the writing in his own magazine—which is aimed at “rescuing forgotten recipes and ingredients from obscurity” (Batuman 2010). Not surprisingly, almost all of these chefs who combine their global aspirations with a strong emphasis on the local spend a significant amount of time traveling within Turkey in search of novel regional recipes and new, high-quality local products.

The local can also be defined temporally. An historical approach to the local translates into investigating Ottoman culinary traditions in search of new recipes and forgotten ways of using ingredients (Karaosmanoğlu 2007). One interviewee researched Ottoman recipes from the imperial kitchen and tried to re-create them using modern techniques. The same chef also made use of “the generous traditions in terms of techniques, ingredients, spices, regional varieties, and diverse influences” in her approach to menu development. She argued that, together, these provide a solid foundation for “a rich culinary culture that has long characterized Ottoman cuisine.”

At first glance it may seem contradictory to hear most of these new-breed chefs, who are critical of the provincialism and attachment to established gastronomic styles of their audiences and customers, making significant reference to the local in their culinary approaches and philosophies. However, this phenomenon is consistent with the more cosmopolitan and global outlook to which these chefs often aspire. Not

only in Istanbul, but in similar gastronomically ambitious cities of the world, claims regarding the authenticity of culinary products more often than not involve references to the local. Among many competing definitions of culinary authenticity, those with an emphasis on the local seem to hold the upper hand in the recent period. Hence many of our chefs seek to imbue their food with authenticity mostly by the innovative introduction of local or local-sounding ingredients. This may also take the form of novel interpretations of traditional dishes informed by recent global culinary approaches.<sup>22</sup> But there is a question that goes beyond food in a discussion of the local: How does localism emerge as a precious asset in the politics and political economy of authenticity in Istanbul?

First, localism is a global trend and is concerned with the local production of food items. At the heart of this culinary philosophy, now propagated through symposia, congresses, and numerous media, lies the advocacy for and use of ingredients primarily sourced from the immediate surroundings or from the wider locality of the restaurant.<sup>23</sup> The rising popularity of farmers’ markets, urban and guerilla gardening, as well as food foraging, are major symptoms of this trend. This new sensibility is strongly related to concerns over the future of industrial agriculture and conventional food supply chains (Murdoch and Miele 2004: 156). In other words, localism can be seen as a reflection of environmentalism and food justice movements in the world of gastronomy and the culinary world. For example, one interviewed chef asserted that many of the luxury ingredients, which traditionally signified high-end restaurants, would soon be either banned or extinct. Citing caviar and foie gras as soon-to-be-banned foods, he further added: “Even for a vegetarian diet one needs to carefully consider that ingredients and the resources needed to grow them are not in limitless supply and therefore they need to be treated and consumed more wisely than in the past.”

Second, for the new-breed chefs who seek to carve out a sustainable place for themselves in the restaurant world, this localist attitude can be instrumental in an increasingly competitive market. They can deploy localism as a survival strategy in the face of growing competition, especially from the concept restaurants of corporate restaurant groups with comparably higher financial resources for marketing and advertising.<sup>24</sup> Some interviewees were particularly critical of these concept restaurants.<sup>25</sup> For example, one independent chef-owner said that she would never think of putting “four salads, four pastas, some sandwiches, and some main courses on the menu.” For her, offering what everybody else offers, even at consistently decent quality, runs contrary to her idea of a restaurant to which customers would want to return. Another young chef-owner, who started his professional cooking

career in London, believed that restaurants offering a seemingly eclectic mix of dishes from various cuisines (Italian, “pan-Asian,” burgers, and steaks) and labeling it “world cuisine” frequently fail to serve up a remarkable experience and stand in opposition to cooking that evokes a “sense of place.” Even restaurant names such as *lokanta* and *kantin* that refer to familiar local restaurant types stand in stark contrast to the foreign-sounding names of concept restaurants such as Sushico, House Café, and Midpoint. These “simple,” understated restaurant names notwithstanding, one can have elaborate multi-course meals, and can choose from carefully curated wine and drinks menus, all at prices far more expensive than the referenced familiar eateries. With only a few exceptions, the restaurants’ designs—menu typography, interior space, “authentic” presentation of dishes, classy but unpretentious, free of any folkloristic elements—could work well in any other major city around the globe.

Here again the importance of the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of cooking, particularly with reference to the authentic qualities of their practices, resurfaces as an important discursive tool for the new cadre of chefs who try hard to remain successful in a competitive business environment.<sup>26</sup> As Ulin (2002) contends in his ethnographic study of the wine-growers in the southwest of France, work should be considered as a “culturally formative activity” that involves not only coding of the end-products (commodities or services) with certain social and symbolic values but also positioning the producers (i.e., workers, laborers) with differentiated endowments of economic and cultural capital that has significant implications for defining their self-identities. By criticizing the eclectic nature and outsized menus in concept restaurants and emphasizing the authentic and refined characteristics of



FIGURE 5: Cooks in action in the kitchen of *Kantin*, the popular lunchtime restaurant-cum-deli offering a refined version of *esnaf lokantası* fare in the upscale neighborhood of Nisantasi.

PHOTOGRAPH BY TUBA ŞATANA © 2015

their own restaurants, many interviewees made clear that they belong to a different league in the culinary world. It is obvious that the recognition of this difference by the consuming public is vital to the success of their efforts to create a more accessible symbolic and cultural terrain both for themselves and their products.

### Politics of Authenticity and the Refashioning of Craftwork

Unquestionably, profound transformations in Istanbul’s culinary scape are taking place. This article has sought to examine these transformations by focusing on three related issues: (a) changes in the nature of the culinary profession (in terms of recruitment channels, career paths, and the general reputation); (b) the emergence of a new cadre of chefs and their general social characteristics; and (c) rising culinary discourses that appear to dominate the restaurant world, namely localism. Put differently, the discussion herein centered on the emerging distinction between cook and chef in Turkey’s complex culinary scene. It has been argued that such a process itself can be useful in understanding the new definitions of the modern shaped by new practices and values that highlight localness and authenticity.

There is another aspect implied by the above issues that has not yet been fully explored. Susan J. Terrio, in her analysis of artisanal chocolate producers in France, suggests that in advanced capitalist societies what “enables ‘genuine,’ locally produced craft work and commodities to be maintained, revived, and/or reinvented” is the “politics of cultural authenticity in the globalization of markets,” on the one hand, and their commodification and commercialization processes, on the other (1996: 71). For her, the politics of cultural authenticity, itself shaped by class and taste distinctions, is inextricably linked to the heightening of market relations and globalized nature of mass production. In other words, the very conditions that make craftwork increasingly redundant and marginal in the world of commodities and global markets also pave the way for the revitalization and reworking of certain craft forms and commodities and locate them as significant elements of the politics of cultural authenticity.

The changing nature of culinary work in Istanbul as presented in this article fits the general perspective proposed by Terrio to understand the politics and political economy of authenticity in late capitalist modernity. In fact, culinary work is among many cases in the larger world of food where one can see similar dynamics at work. The present state of butchering in Turkey is another case in point. Butchering is rapidly ceasing to be a viable livelihood alternative for people who are




experienced in this trade/craft in the face of the rising industrialization of meat processing, concentration in livestock husbandry, and supermarketization. For many, there is a growing shortage of skillful and experienced butchers (*kasap* in Turkish) in the market; older ones are retiring and there are not enough younger butchers to replace them. It is at this juncture that a plethora of meat restaurants from burger joints to *döner* places to Western-style steakhouses opening in recent years have chosen names alluding to “butchering” (*Kasap döner*, *kasap burger*, etc.). There are also many new meat products (all industrial processed and packaged products) in supermarkets from *sucuk* (a spicy beef sausage, very popular in Turkey) to meatballs that make claims of “authenticity” by including the signifier *kasap* in various forms.

Herzfeld (2004: 2) argues that in the age of globalization, “the increasingly homogenous language of culture and ethics constitutes a global hierarchy of value,” marginalizing artisans and craft production in Crete. Mostly coming from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, artisans and their craft production faced insurmountable challenges spatially, economically, and culturally including gentrification, mass production, deskilling, and rising competition from both industrial and “artistic” sectors (ibid.: 13).

To sum up, it is the social and global conditions of production and consumption that have forcefully shaped the current playing field of the politics of authenticity, with strong implications for the global hierarchy of value. Consequently, the globalized sets of values about aesthetic and cultural judgment in relation to authenticity of products and practices have serious repercussions with regard to market values and livelihoods, particularly concerning craftspeople and their production. Projected onto this background, the differences in the kinds of appropriations and subjugations *vis-à-vis* capital that artisanal chocolate makers in France, master craftsmen of various sorts in Crete, the butchers in Turkey, or the above-discussed traditional cooks experience can be read together. Dispossession processes and various inequalities to which they are exposed, especially with regard to education and ownership of means of production, from tools to knowledge, and, consequently, economic and cultural capital, characterize the current state of different kinds and forms of craft production in the world.

Yet the total annihilation of craft production and the general waning of craftspeople have not occurred. In fact, the refashioning of craft production and the emergence of a new group of craftspeople are the distinguishing feature of the current period. This can be seen when one looks closely at the changing nature of culinary work in Istanbul. It has been argued here that recently there is a nascent transition of culinary work from craftsmanship to a more specialized profession. This gradual

process is accompanied, or even fueled, by various means of carving out a distinct professional identity, one that stands in relatively stark contrast to the image of the traditional cook and equates the role of the chef more with that of a cultural producer than a “mere” craftsman. Yet, “the new cook,” or “the chef,” cannot simply do away with the crafted nature of their profession. It is precisely the very nature of their profession with strong allusions to craftsmanship that bestows on them both growing prestige and popularity in the eyes of the new consuming public. This is particularly implicated in their quest for authenticity with an explicit emphasis on the local. In a world that is in a constant state of flux economically, politically, and culturally, it is probably this localism, more than anything else, that characterizes the traditional nature of craftwork.

For Sennett (2009: 8), engaging in craftwork involves much more than making things in a skillful manner: “People can learn about themselves through the things they make, . . . material culture matters.” He further adds that learning from things requires us to care about the qualities of cloth or the right way to poach fish; fine cloth or food cooked well enables us to imagine larger categories of “good.” In its refashioned forms, though, craftwork has limited capacity for helping us to envision and create prospects for a better world. 

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## NOTES

1. Gary Alan Fine, in many of his works, makes a distinction between the cook and the chef: “The chef is the organizer, the manager of the kitchen, and the restaurant’s creative force. With this comes higher status and salary . . . The cook, in contrast, is the line worker who prepares food on a routine, quotidian basis—a manual laborer” (1996a: 88; cf. Boulud 2003). Hence, “creativity, personnel management, and organizational abilities” are particularly important skills that differentiate the role of chefs from that of cooks.
2. The distinction between cooking and cheffing is also related in many ways to discussions about the differences between cooking and cuisine. For example, for Wilk, despite their separate, and often contradictory, places in folk culture and popular perceptions, cooking and cuisine do not necessarily represent two polar opposites from an analytical point of view: “in fact things move constantly from one to another” (2006: 106). Furthermore, Wilk argues that there is a steady “interaction between practice and performance, domestic and public, low and high, local and foreign” in the emergence of national cuisines (ibid.: 107; cf. Mintz 1996).

3. Claudia Roden ascribes the high degree of specialization in the food trade, i.e., restaurants and specialist food producers and sellers, to the legacy of the organization in the Ottoman Palace kitchens where cooks were entrusted with one type of food only (Roden 2005: 150–52).
4. Up until the 1950s, old-style taverns and drinking houses were typically and predominantly owned and frequented by members of Istanbul's non-Muslim minorities (Greek, Armenian, Jewish).
5. A *meyhane* visit is as much about the alcoholic drinks as it is about the food served. *Raki*, an anise-flavored spirit on the order of Middle Eastern arak and French pastis, is the signature drink of the *meyhane*. One also of course can have wine or beer. The *meyhane* dinner revolves around the *meze* and hot starters that encourage *raki* drinking.
6. Tea, *ayran* (a yoghurt-based drink), and domestic and international soft drinks accompany the simple meals in these types of restaurants. The restaurant type also determines whether alcohol is served or not and thus has an immediate impact on the sociocultural fabric of the clientele (Zubaida 2013).
7. There are now literally tens of different kinds/brands of cooking oils, creams, or flours with different qualities that are produced and marketed by global and national food companies which cater to the hospitality industry. Food processing and retailing giants such as Nestlé, Unilever, and Metro have recently intensified their efforts to penetrate into the horeca (*hotel-restaurant-catering*) sector, as they call it, especially with their high-value-added convenience products for culinary professionals. On the other end of the spectrum, one can also see the burgeoning culinary use of more niche products, which are in growing demand by more health and/or environmentally conscious food-enthusiast consumers, ranging from organic to geographically indicated products.
8. Historically speaking, the quest for the professionalization of cooking seems to be one of the driving factors that made “chefing” a rather prominent and integral feature of restaurant work. For example, in France, along with the disintegration of the former institutional parameters of the guild and the courts by 1800, cooks and chefs became engaged in a long struggle to become a profession rather than simply a trade, manual labor, or artisanal craft (Trubek 2000: 30). In the face of the growing modern economy characterized by industrialization and the detailed division of labor, the issue for many cooks was “to mark themselves as professionals not workers” to gain higher status and material standing (ibid.: 89). In their quest for professionalization, they had to wrestle with three major hindrances: the ubiquity of their craft as a domestic practice, the close association of cooking with women, and the ephemeral nature of their final products. Despite these obstacles, cooks and chefs sought to professionalize their trade and uphold their occupational prestige by establishing associations, founding schools, holding conferences and competitions, publishing journals, and organizing exhibitions (ibid.: 108; cf. Symons 2000 and Spang 2001).
9. In this regard, another interesting example is Russia. For Shectman (2009), culinary associations and championships have been instrumental not only for lifting the social and cultural standing of culinary work but also for increasing the feeling of belonging to a community among culinary professionals.
10. <http://yaraticifikirlerenstitusu.com/projects/gastronomika/> (accessed November 23, 2015).
11. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/meslek-yuksekokullarinin-sayisi-802-oldu-26917292> (accessed November 22, 2015).
12. Following Bourdieu, for the purposes of this article, social class is defined in terms of differentiated access to economic, cultural, and social capital. Cultural capital—shaped mostly by social upbringing, educational background, and linguistic abilities—has recently emerged as an important source of distinction and differentiation within the professional culinary community (Bourdieu 1984).
13. Career opportunities are now opening up for a number of young female chefs who have assumed prominent positions in the culinary field. Nevertheless, male dominance in restaurants across the board is widespread as well as in cooking schools and culinary institutes.
14. Istanbul has become a much-featured destination of international food and travel programs, such as Ottolenghi's *Mediterranean Feast*, Bourdain's *No Reservations*, and British chef Tom Aitkens's *Istanbul*. While these shows never fail to present local curiosities of culinary craftsmanship (for instance, *baklava* making, *büryan kebab*, i.e., lamb halves roasted in a sealed clay pit oven), it is usually a small group of chefs (most of whom are among our interviewees) who have come to represent the new, innovative side of Turkish cooking. It is the same group of chefs who frequently appear on local TV programs and in lifestyle magazines and even daily newspapers. For some of the most recent news coverage, see Narin 2015.
15. Fine argues that there are some common occupational rhetorical strategies that chefs and cooks employ to describe and valorize what they do in the restaurant. These strategies usually involve evoking images of professionals, artists, businessmen, and manual laborers. To what degree they promote their work by relying on these images depends on their positions within the kitchen hierarchy, type of restaurant that they work, and/or life course and educational level (Fine 1996b: 93). Therefore, differentiated use of the rhetorical strategies also serves as an important discursive tool for delineating the borderlines between cooking and chefing. The aestheticization of restaurant work can also be considered an occupational rhetoric of art in Fine's terms. Artistic rhetoric, often propelled by “the creative display of cooking, the idiosyncratic transformation of foodstuffs and the presentation of food to appreciative, knowledgeable audiences,” is “contributing to a sense of belonging to a glamorous occupation” and acts as a status marker for chefs (ibid.: 100–1).
16. Many eye the rise of the new breed of Istanbul's chef with interest or even excitement, fewer with outright suspicion. As an example of the latter, the chef-owner of a “mini restaurant empire” much loved by Turkish diners, foreign tourists, and “foodie” TV formats alike is an outspoken critic of his peers. He considers their conspicuous engagement with Turkey's culinary roots at best superficial, at worst a mere marketing maneuver. When interviewed for this article, he was full of scornful remarks addressed to young chefs who have never learned how to carve up a lamb carcass and to others, such as the local chapter of the Slow Food movement which, according to him, wants to revive local food traditions for the sake of “foodie fetishism” (see also Batuman 2010).
17. See, for example, Bartu Candan and Kolluoğlu 2008, Gürbilek 2011, and Keyder 1999, among many others.
18. This group shares the cosmopolitan sensibilities that Hannerz (1996: 103) describes as “an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences” (cf. Appadurai 1996). International travel, communication technologies, and services (from recreation to entertainment) have no doubt played an important role in the diffusion of cosmopolitan tastes, lifestyles, and practices not only in Istanbul but across national borders.
19. For example, Farrer (2010: 3) argues that the new restaurant cultures in some global food cities are increasingly varied gastronomically and are dispersed geographically rather than connected to nations.
20. The label “New Anatolian Cuisine” has gained currency among chefs and food writers and is applied to cooking that emphasizes the use and provenance of regionally-sourced ingredients, even though the vast geography of Anatolia (or Asia Minor) is diverse in terms of climate and topography and can hardly be conceived of as one, coherent region.

21. Similarly, Sims (2010) problematizes the meaning of the local in UK food tourism, arguing that the concept of “local food” is constantly reconfigured according to changing ideals and practicalities of food production, processing, and retail.

22. Items from the recent lunch menu of Lokanta Maya, an acclaimed trendy restaurant of one of the chef-owners interviewed for this article, are a case in point. Including dishes such as “crispy anchovy, aioli sauce,” “spicy sheep’s head, grilled bread,” and “veal tongue, water cress salad” the menu cleverly plays on several culinary themes emphasizing both seasonal (such as *hamsi* or Black Sea anchovies) and local ingredients with a nod to Turkey’s offal tradition and the more recent nose-to-tail eating and cooking trend. Offal dishes like tongue (*dil*) or sheep head (*kelle*), although widely loved, are rarely featured on the current menus of regular restaurant menus but rather are found solely at specialist eateries.

23. Trubek (2008: 140), by citing chefs working in well-known restaurants in the United States, suggests the following: “Chefs know that distinguishing themselves in the business of cooking now requires knowing where their ingredients come from and how they are grown or raised, as well as identifying those ingredients and their origins for their diners.”

24. The genre of the concept restaurant seems to dominate the culinary scene in Istanbul, with its vast resources of capital, marketing, and advertising. Corporate restaurant groups such as Doors, D.ream, Sele Istanbul Restaurant Group, and D&D London not only run mainstream chain eateries positioned above the fast-food segment of the market, but have their own boutique restaurants such as Ca d’Oro, Anjelique, and Gina. Corporate restaurant groups play an ambivalent role in the culinary field. On the one hand, they are quick to pick up on international culinary trends—sometimes by launching franchises of international concepts, modifying them to suit the tastes of a mainstream audience—and thus play an integral part in making the restaurant experience trendy and desirable. On the other, they are responsible for standardizing tastes and menus, especially in their less individualistic but more mainstream outlets of “high street chains” or “concept restaurants.”

25. By means of their logistical and managerial capabilities and especially their financial resources, corporate restaurant groups are intervening in and irreversibly altering the real estate and labor markets for the city’s restaurant industry and, thus, making it increasingly difficult for individual restaurateurs and chef-owners to find and sustainably inhabit niches in the market. Furthermore, restaurant groups usually are better able to manage the investments and the financial risk that come with the business than individual chef-owners. Stand-alone restaurants and individual chef-owners often have to struggle to create a buzz and anxiously depend on positive reviews and word-of-mouth, which still does not guarantee a sustainable number of customer visits.

26. This is reminiscent of Vanina Leschziner’s observations about a similar tension in chefs’ discursive and behavioral patterns in her ethnographic research of elite chefs in New York and San Francisco. Authenticity, she remarks, stems from conformity (to a style) as much as from originality. Constantly changing styles make an actor seem inauthentic, while loyalty to a style without an element of novelty may appear as nothing but a copy of somebody else’s creation. The cuisine, as cultural product, cannot be too original, because it must remain recognizable for the audience, yet it needs to be distinctive enough to stand out among competitors and thus enhance its creator’s reputation (Leschziner 2007: 81).

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