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“Koláče in the Blogosphere: Cultivating Food Expertise through Domesticity, Femininity, and Ethnicity”

Cathryn Janka

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Humanities, Old Dominion University  
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**Abstract**

Koláče in the Blogosphere is an analysis of food blogs to determine how female food bloggers cultivate food expertise through domesticity, femininity, and ethnicity. Their readership are predominately the adult children and grandchildren of immigrants seeking rediscovery of lost recipes or the completion of partial recipes of loved ones that have passed on. The bloggers are typically recent immigrants themselves or native writers in their home countries sharing recipes with those seeking rediscovery. Gender and food studies scholars have studied women as guardians of domesticity, ethnicity, the world of ethnic cuisine, and food authenticity along with the matrilineal transmission of ethnic culture and cuisine in domestic settings. It was not until late in the last century that it became acceptable for descendants of European immigrants to explore and celebrate their ethnic heritage. This paper uses *koláče* and their close cousins *koláčky* and *kolachi* as lenses for examining expressions of domesticity, ethnicity, femininity, and food authenticity in food blogs. It analyzes a selection of food blogs with primarily female authors of central and eastern European ethnicity or heritage with posts on koláče, koláčky, or kolachi as sources for what they reveal about these concepts and about the food blog as a medium for creating, expressing, and reinforcing identity. This paper argues that female bloggers can obtain guardian or gatekeeper status through their careful presentation of koláče within its traditional setting, curating for their readers sources of difficult to procure items and maintaining an aura of welcoming and warm domesticity and femininity.

## Keywords

curate	food blog
domesticity	food studies
ethnicity	koláče
femininity	kolachi
food authenticity	koláčky

As the internet has come into its own as a means of research, interpersonal connectivity, and identity expression, blogging, and more specifically food blogging, has become relatively commonplace and serves as a way for individuals to express who they are, and from whence they and their people have come. Food blogging in particular is a world that tends to be dominated by women. Gender and food studies scholars have studied women as guardians of domesticity, ethnicity, the world of ethnic cuisine, and food authenticity.<sup>1</sup> As they are growing up, girls often learn at the elbows of mothers, grandmothers, and aunts how to make the favorite foods of their families and the food their ancestors ate. For the first generation of children born to immigrants, there is often the strong desire and external push to forget the traditions of their parents, to fully embrace and assimilate the culture, the cuisine, and the traditions of mainstream society, and in so doing become fully American or whatever nationality dominates their family's new home country. In school lunches, the children of immigrants long for a simple peanut butter and jelly sandwich on soft white bread instead of, for example, pickled herring on rye, or *obložené*

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<sup>1</sup> Much has been written on ethnic and immigrant food from a gendered lens. An excellent starting point is Sherrie A. Inness, *Pilaf, Pozole, and Pad Thai: American Women and Ethnic Food* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2001).

*chlebičky*.<sup>2</sup> However, as these same children mature and become parents, the foods that made them cringe with embarrassment often become points of nostalgia and fondness. As adults, it may become “cooler” to be ethnic, depending on the political climate of the moment.<sup>3</sup> One of the easiest ways to express this rediscovery of ethnicity is to prepare, share, and consume the cuisine of one’s forbearers.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes, it takes a generation or two for one’s ethnic identity to become “hip” again. If one is lucky, someone from the older generation is still around to share the recipes of one’s childhood. The internet can also be a source of rediscovering one’s ethnic

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<sup>2</sup> Pickled herring on rye is a popular snack in the Baltic region, Germany, the Netherlands, and across Scandinavia. Included in this note are several blog posts that cite some variations of pickled herring on rye. Chef Markus Mueller of Earth, Food, and Fire references the simplest version that I also recall from the German half of my family—“Growing up my father loved eating pickled herring. He would eat it plain on dark rye bread with just a little butter, straight out of the jar.” In my family, we often eat it on plain rye crisps or English water crackers. Just like one of the authors of the blog What’s Cooking America, we eat pickled herring at Christmas and New Year’s for luck and prosperity – “Eating herring at midnight will ensure a bountiful year. The silvery coloring of the herring represents silver coins, and we all want a bounty of those.” Marvis K., “Sillmacka (Swedish-Style Herring Sandwich),” *Meals by Mavis*, March 5, 2022, <https://mealsbymavis.com/sillmacka-swedish-style-herring-sandwich/>; Emilia Morano-Williams, “Meet Smørrebrød, the Best Sandwich You’re Not Eating,” *Serious Eats*, August 10, 2018, <https://www.seriouseats.com/smorrebrod-introduction-danish-sandwich>; Markus Mueller, “Pickled Herring Sandwich - a German Style Lunch,” *Earth, Food, and Fire*, May 2017, 2017, <https://www.earthfoodandfire.com/pickled-herring-sandwich-a-german-style-lunch/>; What’s Cooking America, “German Herring Salat Recipe - Pickled Herring Salad,” *What’s Cooking America*, 2017, <https://whatscookingamerica.net/seafood/herringsalat.htm>.

*Obložené chlebičky* are open-face sandwiches often served as fancy appetizers similar to canapes in Czech homes, including the homes of my Czech cousins in Czechia. They are usually served on *veka* – a Czech white bread that is a slightly chewy baguette-shaped loaf, have potato salad or butter spread as a base, and are topped with artfully arranged deli slices, sliced cheese, cornichons/baby *gerkins*, small slices of tomato, thin sliced radishes, and maybe a sprig of fresh herbs. Kristýna of the blog *Czech Cookbook* and Petra of the blog *Cook Like Czechs* both have recipes for these, other open-faced one-bite sandwiches called *jednohubky* (singular *jednohubka*), the *veka* bread, and additional toppings for these treats. They are haute cuisine in Prague. Kristýna Koutná, “Open-Faced Sandwiches – *Chlebičky*,” *Czech Cookbook*, November 21, 2013, <https://www.czechcookbook.com/fancy-sandwiches-chlebicky/#more-514>; Petra Kupská, “Open-Faced Sandwiches – Czech *Chlebičky*,” *Cook Like Czechs*, November 29, 2020, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/chlebicky-czech-open-faced-sandwiches/>.

<sup>3</sup> On the children and grandchildren of immigrants’ discovery of their ethnic roots, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). In Chapter One “Hyphen Nation,” Frye Jacobson talks about the gradual rediscovery of ethnicity among European Americans. This notion is also in Gabaccia’s *We Are What We Eat*. Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> On this rediscovery of ethnicity in the food realm see especially Chapter Seven of: Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*.

identity through food. Alternatively, some have the opportunity to return to the land of their ancestors for work, tourism, or family reasons. They may then eat the same or similar dishes their forbearers ate in restaurants, watch local cooking shows on TV, learn how to prepare national dishes from their neighbors or distant relatives, or read local cookbooks. For the immigrant who comes to their new country as an adult, there is often a strong desire to remain connected to the culture and family they left behind. As taste and scent memories are some of the earliest and most intense, this continued connection is frequently done through food and cooking the everyday dishes they ate growing up.

This paper uses *koláče* and their close cousins *koláčky* and *kolachi* as lenses for examining expressions of domesticity, ethnicity, femininity, and food authenticity in food blogs. It analyzes a selection of food blogs with primarily female authors of Ashkenazi, Belarus, Czech, Polish, Slovak, or Ukrainian ethnicity or heritage with posts on *koláče*, *koláčky*, or *kolachi* as sources for what they reveal about these concepts and about the food blog as a medium for creating, expressing, and reinforcing identity. To do this, this paper examines the description of *koláče* and its history or the recipe provenance by the blog author, the overall presentation of the blog and the particular post, and the blog post discussion. It also explores how bloggers in the post discussions depict themselves as gatekeepers or guardians of these concepts for a wider community of blog readers and users. Bloggers create and maintain a relationship with their viewers/users through commenting on their guests' posts. What role do these exchanges about *koláče* reveal about their (gendered) role as gatekeepers of authenticity? This paper argues that female bloggers can obtain expert guardian or gatekeeper status through their careful presentation of *koláče* within its traditional authentic ethnic setting, curating for their readers

sources for finding or making difficult to find ingredients or equipment, and maintaining an aura of welcoming and warm domesticity and femininity.

This short study begins with a brief description of koláče, koláčky, kolachi, and their histories. It then includes a short discussion of the scholarly literature in the fields of food studies, gender, and ethnicity that informs this study, my approach, and my contributions. Then, it analyzes my selection of bloggers, their original posts, and the discussions between bloggers and viewers that follows. While I organize my analysis by type of koláče, I identify how bloggers express connections between concepts of domesticity, ethnicity, femininity, and food authenticity. These identities, I argue, help bloggers position themselves as koláče “food curators,” a trustworthy expert for learning and talking about a sweet treat that is central to many central and eastern Europeans’ food, cultural, and community traditions.<sup>5</sup>

### **Koláče, Koláčky, Kolachi: History and Variations**

Koláče are a sweet treat from central Europe that exemplify this role food plays in the process of forming, reforming, and sustaining cultural identity. Koláče are critical to an examination of identity because they are used to celebrate key events and moments that create and maintain family, community, ethnicity, and religion including weddings, baptisms, first communions, visits from distant relatives, special holidays, and religious and ethnic festivals, both at home and in the places where central and eastern Europeans migrated and settled.<sup>6</sup> In the

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<sup>5</sup> Sofie Joosse and Brian J. Hrac, “Curating the Quest for ‘Good Food’: the Practices, Spatial Dynamics and Influence of Food-related Curation in Sweden,” *Geoforum* 64 (August 1 2015), 205-216, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.06.024>, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016718515001724>.

<sup>6</sup> For a collection of koláče, koláčky, and kolachi recipes history gathered from community cookbooks from various Czech and Slovak immigrant communities in the United States, please see Cedar Rapids Museum Guild of the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, IA, Members of *Czech & Slovak Kolaches & Sweet Treats*, ed.

present-day Czech Republic, or Czechia, it is referred to in the plural as koláče, a sweet round yeast bun with an impression in the center filled with traditional fillings of sweet ground poppyseed, plum butter, sweet cheese, and maybe apple, pear, or apricot fruit butter (*povidla* or *lekvar*).<sup>7</sup> The singular of koláče is *koláč*, but *koláč* can also refer to a larger sharable item that is a sweet yeast cake, like a European coffeecake or a yeast based tart. *Koláč* is a word whose origin is much older. It is possibly derived from the old [Church] Slavonic (the mother language of most modern Slavic languages) word *kolo* for “round” or “wheel.” In Polish, sweet cheese or pudding filled round yeast buns are called *drożdżówki*, specifically *drożdżówki z serem* (buns with cheese) or *drożdżówki z budyniem* (buns with pudding or custard). In Ukrainian or Russian, these same items are called *vatrushka* and are often filled with sweet cheese, fruits like fresh cherries or cherry filling, or poppyseed filling. Despite the differences in names, the base dough is always a sweetened enriched dough that is meant to be soft and cake like and they are all traditionally round with only occasional artistic variations for variety and visual appeal.

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Melinda Bradnan Miram Canter, Dorothy Crum, Junaita Loven, Dwayne Bourret, Joan Liffing-Zug Bourret (Iowa City, IA: Penfield Press, 2001).

For more information on special holidays (*Dožínky*, *Hody*, *Fažánek*, *Masopust*, Easter, and Christmas) when koláče are important components, see the assorted koláče blog posts of Petra Kupská especially the following, Petra Kupská, “Best Poppy Seed Kolache,” *Cook Like Czechs*, November 30, 2023, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/poppy-seed-kolache/>; Petra Kupská, “Czech Plum Kolaches,” *Cook Like Czechs*, September 30, 2023, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/plum-kolaches/#recipe>; Petra Kupská, “Czech Tied Kolache (Vázané Koláče),” *Cook Like Czechs*, March 20, 2024, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/czech-tied-kolache-vazane-kolace/>; Petra Kupská, “Poppy Seed Roll - Czech Makový Závin,” *Cook Like Czechs*, May 7, 2021, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/czech-poppy-seed-roll/>; Petra Kupská, “Slovak Nut Roll (Orechovy Zavín),” *Cook Like Czechs*, March 9, 2023, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/nut-roll-recipe/>.

<sup>7</sup> *Povidla* usually refers to a fruit butter made from fresh fruit. *Lekvar*, where it is used by local speakers, usually refers to a fruit butter made from rehydrated dried fruit. Both types of fruit butters contain little or no added sugar other than 100 percent fruit juice or maybe honey in the case of *lekvars*, neither contain any added pectin or thickeners, and both are stewed or reduced until they are quite thick like a butter or jam.

There is also a small delicacy called a *koláček*, or “cookie,” that is made from a special flaky cheese dough similar in texture to pie crust dough.<sup>8</sup> A *koláček* may come in a variety of shapes from thumbprint-type cookies called *koláčky* in the plural to slippers (*střevíčky*), pockets (*taštičky*), scarves (*šátečky*), envelopes (*psanička*), triangles (*trojuhelníky*), and tied (*vázané*) bundles or purses.<sup>9</sup> Some purists may argue that shapes other than circles or rounds are not *koláčky*. However, the dough used to encase the fillings is the same as that used for *koláčky* as are the fillings. *Koláče*, too, especially when they are made by German-speakers or other non-Czechs, may come in other forms than the traditional round, like a square. Examples of non-round *koláčky* made by Czech neighbors include the dairy-based crescent or horn-shaped *rugelach* of Ashkenazi Jewish culinary tradition, the *kifli* or *kiffles* of Hungarian culinary tradition, and scarf-like *kolaczki* of Polish culinary tradition.

Kolachi are made with a slightly sweet, enriched dough like *koláče*, but the dough is rolled out into about a 12x10-inch rectangle, the filling is spread out in a thin layer across the

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<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that the American English word “cookie” derives from the 18th century Dutch word *koekje* or “little cake.” See “Cookie,” in *Oxford Reference*, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095636982>.

<sup>9</sup> UpDownFlight, “Psanička, Šátečky a Koláčky (Envelopes, Scarves & Koláčky Cookies),” *Bird Flight*, 12/08/2021, <https://birdflight.blog/2021/12/08/psanicka-satecky-trojuhelniky-a-kolacky-z-tvarohoveho-testa-envelopes-scarves-triangles-and-kolacky-cookies/>; The blogger mentions *tvarohoveho testa* (*tvaroh*-based pastry dough) as the unifying factor in all the various shapes of *koláčky*-type cookies. In this method, the flour is added to the creamed butter, *tvaroh*, salt, and vanilla sugar mixture. The soft dough is shaped into a soft square, covered, and allowed to rest in the refrigerator for several hours or overnight. It is then removed, rolled out into a rectangle, and folded lengthwise. This is repeated two more times in way similar to rough puff or *blitz* puff pastry, but without the large chunks of dough. If the butter and *tvaroh* had been cut into the flour, salt, and vanilla sugar dry mixture with a pastry cutter, allowed to rest, and then folded a few times, it would have more resembled *pâte sucrée*, or French sweet pastry dough, where the eggs are replaced by the *tvaroh* as a binder.

Petra Kupská of *Cook like Czechs* also mentions this special flaky cheese-based dough, *tvarohové těsto*, in both her “Easy Kolacky Cookies” recipe and “Plum Butter Filled Crescents” recipe. Her recipe is simply butter, soft *tvaroh*, and flour. She also supports UpDownFlight’s assertion that the *tvarohové těsto* is the base for a variety of cookies in the different shapes such as *koláčky*, *rohlíčky*, and *šátečky*. Petra Kupská, “Easy Kolacky Cookies,” *Cook Like Czechs*, August 2, 2021, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/easy-kolacky-cookies/>; Petra Kupská, “Czech Filled Crescent Cookies Recipe,” *Cook Like Czechs*, April 11, 2020, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/povidlove-satecky-czech-crescent-cookies-with-plum-butter-filling/>.



surface of the rectangle leaving a ½- to 1-inch border, and, beginning with one of the 12-inch edges, it is rolled up into a long loaf shape.<sup>10</sup> They are allowed to rise, and are brushed with an egg wash or a milk-and-egg wash after a final rise before going into the oven, or brushed with just melted butter while they are still hot from the oven after baking. After they cool, they can be sliced like a loaf of sandwich bread to reveal a spiral pattern that is sometimes called a Catherine wheel<sup>11</sup>. Because the slice still resembles a wheel or circle, it can still be called a *kolach*, from the Old Slavonic “*kolo*.” Kolachi is the plural and this spelling most likely comes from Rusyn (Ruthenian).<sup>12</sup> The traditional fillings for kolachi are poppyseed, sweetened ground walnut,

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on Rusyn kolachi, festival baking, and the religious occasions when koláče, koláčky, and kolachi might be served as refreshment, please see especially the introduction, the chapter on bread, etc., and the chapter on specialty dishes of Cookbook Committee of Ascension of Our Lord and Our Lady of Perpetual Help Byzantine Catholic Churches, *Ethnic Delights: A Cookbook of Ascension of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church [in] Williamsburg, VA and Our Lady of Perpetual Help Byzantine Catholic Church [in] Virginia Beach, VA*, ed. Helen Yura-Petro and Joseph Petro (Virginia Beach, VA: Our Lady of Perpetual Help Byzantine Catholic Church and Parish, 1992; repr., 2nd printing).

For additional information on the link between religious and secular life in Rusyn domestic culinary tradition, please see especially the chapters on ethnic favorites, Christmas Eve supper, and a traditional Easter basket in Club Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church Ethnic Craft, *Carpathian Cookery: Carpatho-Rusyn and American Favorites* (Uniontown, PA: Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church, 1990). See also Cookbook Committee of the Ladies Guild of St. Mary's American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church, *Favorite Recipes Collected by St. Mary's Ladies Guild [in] Endicott, New York*, ed. Mary Ann Macko (Kearney, NE: Cookbooks by Morris Press, 1984).

<sup>11</sup> A Catherine Wheel refers to the attempted martyrdom of 4th century Christian martyr St. Catherine of Alexandria. In this form of torture with a breaking wheel, the victim was tied with their limbs outstretched as a heavy wheel was rolled across their body and limbs breaking bones and dislocating joints. Death was usually due to extensive trauma and shock like being crushed by a pile of stones. For this reference, please see definition 2 of the Collins (online) Dictionary that is borrowed from the 4th edition of Webster's New World College Dictionary where Catherine wheel is synonymous with a (spiral-style) pinwheel, rather than the four-point star on a stick children's toy or lawn ornament that is also called a pinwheel. See Catholic Online, “Saint Catherine of Alexandria,” *Catholic Online*, [https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=341](https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=341); “Catherine wheel,” 4 ed., *Webster's New World College Dictionary* (Collins Dictionaries, 2010), <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/catherine-wheel>.

<sup>12</sup> *Committing Community: Carpatho-Rusyn Studies as an Emerging Scholarly Discipline*, ed. Elaine Rusinko, East European Monographs, (New York: Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center Distributed by Columbia University Press, 2009).

This collection of individual essays by members of the AAASS looks at the challenges of defining Rusyns/Carpatho-Rusyns/Subcarpathian-Rusyns/Ruthenians/Lemkos as a unified ethnographic group with their own language and customs that make them unique and different from their neighbors in Slovakia, the Ukraine, and southeastern Poland. That they have been known by so many names over the years increases the challenge. Religiously, they are mostly Christian and tend to associate with Byzantine Rite Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, or specifically Ukrainian or Polish orthodoxy. Their spoken language is a mixture of East Slavic, West Slavic, and some South Slavic elements. Those living in the Ukraine use a Cyrillic alphabet and those living in Poland and

sweetened cheese, dried apricot butter, and dried European plum/prune butter. In some central and eastern European traditions, fruit butters made from rehydrated dried fruits may be called *lekvar* regardless of the dried fruit used. In other traditions, only the fruit butter made from prunes is called *lekvar*. Other names for kolachi in Polish are *makowiec* (filled with poppy seed filling) or more formally *strucla makowa*, or *rolada orzechowa* (filled with nut filling). In Slovak, kolachi may be called *makovník*, *orechovník*, or *tvarožník* depending on their filling. *Makovník* are filled with poppyseed filling and *orechovník* are filled with nut filling often made from walnuts, but any favorite locally sourced nut can be substituted like hazelnut/filbert, almond, pecan, hickory, or butternut.<sup>13</sup> *Tvarožník* is made with a sweetened farmer's cheese filling. *Tvaroh* is similar to quark, and its taste and appearance is slightly tangier than cottage cheese that has been strained of most of its liquid. It can be made a variety of ways from whole milk, buttermilk, or yogurt and may contain additional liquid or semi-liquid dairy products. None

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Slovakia use the Romanized alphabet of their neighbors. They began to find their voice alongside their Polish and Slovak neighbors towards the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with the rise of nationalism.

<sup>13</sup> Uzel Family, *Uzel Family Cookbook: 100 Years in America-Czech Recipes and Other Favorites* (Kearney, NE: Morris Press Cookbooks, 2010). Peanuts and pecans are very popular among the descendants of Czech and Slovak immigrants to Prince George County in Virginia. On October 15, 2022 at their 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Virginia Czech and Slovak Folklife Festival honoring Czech and Slovak immigrants that settled the area between a little before World War I and WWII and after World War II, they were selling loaves of cinnamon pecan nut rolls that tasted like cinnamon pecan breakfast rolls minus the sticky white icing. Also for sale was a family/community cookbook that featured similar recipes for a [cinnamon-vanilla] "Peanut Roll" (page 129) and "Poppy Seed Roll or [Pea-]Nut Roll" (page 133) where the home baker may have used one of these recipes and swapped pecans for the peanuts. Both of these nut roll recipes and the cinnamon pecan nut roll were made in the style of kolachi, but the Uzel family refers to them as *buchta* in the cookbook. The family emigrated from an ethnic Czech village in what is now Gernik, Romania in 1911 and all the modern descendants stem from two brothers, Charles and Frank Uzel, and their sister Theresa Uzel Diakakis. Charles grew tobacco and Frank farmed peanuts. The cookbook is an homage mostly to their industrious wives Caroline Kuska Uzel and Mary Glaser Uzel respectively. The recipes for peanut nut rolls/kolachi/*buchta* reflect a common tendency among immigrant populations to adapt traditional recipes by using readily available ingredients in their new land. The recipe maintains as much authenticity to the original homeland versions as possible while replacing the harder to find and more expensive walnut with a product grown locally by the family, the peanut. Helen Fiala, *The Best Czech Cooking and Collected Recipes of Helen Fiala*, ed. Lyla (Fiala) Ransdall and Kathryn (Fiala) Schilling (Independence, IA: Cookbook Specialist, 1993). Taking inspiration from the *Uzel Family Cookbook* and Fiala's old-time recipe for a raisin nut filling for koláče (P, 101), one could replace the [wal-]nuts in Fiala's recipe with some salted Virginia peanuts from the Virginia Diner for a nod to the "world famous" peanut raisin pie of the old Surry House Restaurant in Surry, VA for an innovative regional approach to the traditional Uzel recipe for nut rolls (kolachi) and Fiala's traditional recipes for koláče.

of the methods require rennet, and most use a souring agent like lemon juice, white vinegar, cultured buttermilk, or live-culture yogurt. Some are done over the stove, some are aged on the counter, and some use a combination of both stove heating and brief counter-aging/light fermentation. These variations in names, recipes, and fillings are reflected in the blogs studied for this paper. As this paper reveals, while the great variation of koláče evidences the ethnic-cultural and regional-specific nature of cuisines, most women who blog about koláče draw on expressions of domesticity, femininity, and ethnicity to project an authoritative and reliable voice for their viewers.

### **Scholarly Literature on Blogging and Identity**

This analysis of koláče blogs draws on and contributes to work by food, media, and gender studies scholars who have written on how new forms of communication have helped female bloggers express their identities and expertise. Communications and media professor Alane Presswood's book *Food Blogs, Postfeminism, and the Communication of Expertise*, looks at how women may embrace or reject the concept of "Domestic Goddess" in their food blogs depending on their own personal views and how they perceive it helps to boost or to hurt their interactions with readers.<sup>14</sup> It is particularly concerned with how food blogs may be viewed as useful tools of study for rhetoric and social media and expressions of identity. As with the women studied by Presswood, how koláče bloggers experience, prepare, and present the koláče of their childhood or heritage, or their experience as immigrants or the descendants of

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<sup>14</sup> Alane L. Presswood, *Food Blogs, Postfeminism, and the Communication of Expertise: Digital Domestics*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020).

immigrants plays a crucial role in their self-identification and their individual place in culture. Presswood also discusses the traditionally close bond between home food production and the domestic sphere. While women may have found pleasure and fulfillment in providing sustenance for their families and special treats for their loved ones, cooking or baking was a double-edged sword that often limited their ability to breakout of the domestic sphere into more public and traditionally masculine forms of artistic expression like sculpture and architecture. So, while women tend to dominate the food blogging world, this may be a shadowy continuation of their culturally constrained artistic expression, according to Presswood.<sup>15</sup> Presswood's work also discusses the concept of "food porn" – food displayed and photographed or described in such a sensual way as to inspire yearnings and desire in ways similar to the display of the nude or semi-nude human form in traditional pornography. These dramatic presentations allow the viewer/reader to nearly taste or touch the sumptuously visual or verbal feast displayed on the screen.

Tisha Dejamnee expands on the concept of food porn in her article "'Food Porn' as Postfeminist Play."<sup>16</sup> Dejamnee goes in depth explaining this concept, its history, and how women bloggers reclaim control over their bodies and sexuality by turning the focus on food. Food is photographed whether consciously or unconsciously by female bloggers to recall images of the female body ripe and ready for love, such as "surprise" or *piñata* layer cakes with a triangular slice removed and candy-coated chocolates pouring out onto the cake plate<sup>17</sup> or the

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<sup>15</sup> Presswood, *Food Blogs, Postfeminism, and the Communication of Expertise*, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Tisha Dejamnee, "'Food Porn' as Postfeminist Play: Digital Femininity and the Female Body on Food Blogs," *Television & New Media* 17, no. 5 (2016), 429-448, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476415615944>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1527476415615944>.

<sup>17</sup> Dejamnee, "'Food Porn' as Postfeminist Play," 439, Figure 3.

image of a gently poached egg slightly broken and its yolk oozing out on to a salad of field greens and other spring fruits and vegetables.<sup>18</sup> The sexuality of most of the food blogs studied for this paper is far more subtle than what Dejamnee describes. However, it may still be there unconsciously as the image of two open-faced round koláče with a single blanched almond half in the center of each luscious puddle of plum povidla filling resembles certain aspects of female anatomy ready to be devoured.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps another example of this imagery is the image of a fluffy *buchta* bun (made with sweet koláče dough encasing a filling baked lined in a pan with sides touching like a dinner roll) with a bite taken out of it with abundant warm or viscous filling oozing out.<sup>20</sup>

Elena Levine's edited collection, *Cupcakes, Pinterest and Ladyporn* but especially, Elizabeth Nathanson's contribution, "Sweet Sisterhood: Cupcakes as Sites of Feminized Consumption and Production," connects food presentation and production with ideas of femininity and sisterhood. Nathanson identifies how some women who make cupcakes, especially those featured on TV and in other forms of popular culture, shift the focus from their feminine bodies to the actual food they produce and how they produce it.<sup>21</sup> Her chapter explores the hipster world of designer cupcakes especially as they appear on television food programs. In

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<sup>18</sup> Dejamnee, "'Food Porn' as Postfeminist Play," 437, Figure 1.

<sup>19</sup> Petra Kupská, "Czech Kolache Authentic Recipe," *Cook Like Czechs*, March 14, 2020, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/ceske-kolace-authentic-recipe-for-czech-kolache/>. See especially the image of the almond topped plum povidla koláče on the baking tray ready to go into the oven and the finished tray that has recently been removed from the oven.

<sup>20</sup> Natasha Kravchuk, "Sweet Poppy Seed Buns (Pirohi)," *Natasha's Kitchen*, September 25, 2014, <https://natashaskitchen.com/sweet-poppy-seed-bind-pirohi/>. See especially the image of the bitten *pirohi* (*buchta*) right before Natasha's "About" box and the comments section.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Nathanson, "Sweet Sisterhood: Cupcakes as Sites of Feminized Consumption and Production," in *Cupcakes, Pinterest, and Ladyporn: Feminized Culture in the Early Twenty-first Century*, ed. Elena Levine (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 249-267.

*Cupcake Wars* and *DC Cupcakes*, female bakers tend to dominate this delicate feminine world of pink fluffy swirly frosting and homey flavors. When a male competitor does appear on *Cupcake Wars*, he is usually quick to distinguish himself from his feminine competitors who may have been trained or inspired by the other women in their life and instead he claims the title of pastry chef to indicate his formal and traditionally masculine training.<sup>22</sup> Did I say pink frosting a few lines ago? Nathanson also mentions “that the color pink permeates”<sup>23</sup> these shows and other texts that she explores in her chapter. Many of the women examined in this paper also use koláče blogs to project images of femininity rooted in home cooking, female networks of culinary knowledge, and even colors deemed as especially feminine. The blog of Anna Pisulak, the *Pink Panther/Różowa Patera*, for example, is awash with rose-tinted foods and imagery. She very definitely claims the traditional association of pink and femininity. Her food images also feature triangles, pie slices, and ovum or womb-shapes...but these images are also naturally occurring in food production.<sup>24</sup> Many foods are made easiest as circles or round cakes/pies and are subdivided most evenly as pie slices.

Paula Salvio, in her article, “Dishing It Out: Food Blogs and Post-Feminist Domesticity,” focuses on how modern female food bloggers seem to replicate the concerns and coy domesticity of 1950s and 1960s postwar food writers like the editors of the *Better Homes and Gardens Cookbook*.<sup>25</sup> During this era, women were expected to look stunning all the time,

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<sup>22</sup> Nathanson, “Sweet Sisterhood,” 254.

<sup>23</sup> Nathanson, “Sweet Sisterhood,” 254.

<sup>24</sup> Pisulak, *Pink Panther/Różowa Patera*, (blog).

<sup>25</sup> Paula M. Salvio, “Dishing It Out: Food Blogs and Post-Feminist Domesticity,” *Gastronomica* 12, no. 3 (2012), 31-39, <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2012.12.3.31>, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/gfc.2012.12.3.31>.

manage home and hearth impeccably, and present beautiful meals for their husbands and families. Some did this effortlessly or at least without questioning the outside imposed expectation. Others resisted. Much the same is true today among female food bloggers. Some try to display exotic and exquisitely presented dishes containing only the finest and most healthful ingredients. Others are much more down to earth and eschew fancy elaborate dishes with impossible to find ingredients. All seem to acknowledge a yearning for simpler times with comforting foods.<sup>26</sup> This is echoed in the blogs examined for this paper. Each blogger expressed a desire to return to a time of the simpler, more familiar foods of their youth or prior generations, whether that desire was fueled by a wish to reconnect or to escape the modern rat race.<sup>27</sup> In the simpler times of youth or yesteryear there is a perceived notion women were more intimate and casual with their female counterparts, i.e. they were more likely to stop by for coffee or tea and chat and they referred to each other by first names only. This may be reflected in the tendency of some bloggers to use only first names to introduce themselves in their “About” pages, as demonstrated by Olga of *Olga’s Flavor Factory*, and Valentina of *Valentina’s Corner*. Here using only first names is a means of inviting closeness or intimacy with readers while at the same time withholding some details of domestic life to maintain familial privacy and security.

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<sup>26</sup> Salvio, “Dishing It Out,” 33-34.

<sup>27</sup> Rachel Laudan, “A Plea for Culinary Modernism: Why We Should Love New, Fast, Processed Food,” *Gastronomica* 1 (February 2001), 36-44, <https://www.rachellaudan.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/12/plea-for-culinary-modernism.pdf>. Laudan makes a point in her article of questioning if the good old days were really all that great, culinary speaking. She compares our modern obsession with farm to table, fresh is best, and processed is bad with the harsh realities of no refrigeration, unimproved food stuffs of poor quality, and the disparity between classes and urban versus country. In her final estimation, despite be raised to laud and aspire to a return to the land fresh way of life where one makes everything from scratch with the best and most local ingredients, perhaps improved strains of meat and produce, ready to go foods devoid of detritus, and labor and time saving devices and foods that free us up for other activities outside the house are not as bad as we have been lead to believe by the fresh food and homemade elitists.

How do home-taught food bloggers, most of whom have learned to bake koláče at their mother's or grandmother's elbows, move from purely domestic purveyors of food for their families to internet experts? A possible answer can be found in the article by Sofie Joosse and Brian Hracs, "Curating the Quest for 'Good Food': The Practices, Spatial Dynamics and Influence of Food-related Curation in Sweden."<sup>28</sup> While this article focuses on finding "good food" in Sweden and reviews a variety of means of doing this, there is mention of and review of food bloggers in the article. Curate derives from the Latin word *curare* means "to care for" and has been used to describe clergy members with pastoral care responsibilities or those individuals working in museums or zoos who are responsible for acquiring and caring for the material things or creatures in their exhibits. How does this translate to food in general and food blogging specifically? In the search for "good food," it is easy for consumers to become lost in the myriads of terms and ethical food choices—organic, local, farm-to-table, nose-to-tail, sustainable methods, humane treatment of animals, ethical treatment of workers, small farmer friendly, low carbon footprint, etc. Developing relationships with and relying on food curators can help consumers "farm out" some of the decision-making process. These curators could be food bloggers, collective buying units like co-ops, farmer's markets, food [delivery] bags like Blue Apron or a delivery-type CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) entity, or food sourcing apps. Through the developed relationships, buyers can then place their trust in the blogger, the co-op director, etc. and don't have to invest as much time searching out individual items and evaluating based on their highest areas of concern.<sup>29</sup> Food bloggers can provide a high level of motivation

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<sup>28</sup> Joosse and Hracs, "Curating the Quest for 'Good Food': the Practices, Spatial Dynamics and Influence of Food-related Curation in Sweden," *Geoforum* 64 (August 2015), 205-216, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016718515001724>.

<sup>29</sup> Joosse and Hracs, "Curating the Quest for 'Good Food'," 211.



as they introduce followers to new food and cooking or baking techniques.<sup>30</sup> They also provide a source for online community building as followers post “feedback, experiences and advice in response to blog posts and online queries.”<sup>31</sup> Bloggers cultivate intimacy with their followers by sharing snippets of their personal lives and relating their food experiences and encouraging followers to do the same. With the passage of time, the intimacy and levels of trust increases as the community develops through regular personal posts.<sup>32</sup> Joose and Hracs found that “with no face-to-face interaction, the food blogger is considered a highly trustworthy curator by his [or her] followers, which allows him [or her] to influence many of them.”<sup>33</sup> The study by Joose and Hracs also revealed that food “curators are not motivated solely by economic profit but rather a range of economic, societal, and environmental considerations and intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.”<sup>34</sup> In my review of the food bloggers analyzed in this paper, this curation process can be extended to the search for ingredients considered ethnically authentic or methods of preparing one’s own authentic ingredients like fresh cheeses when the ingredients are not commercially available in the country in which one resides. The sharing of personal stories, especially how bloggers were first introduced to the cuisine in their “About” section or in the description of the food item further connects the food blog author to the community and invites their readers to share their personal connections to the food item and culture while still providing the blogger with a position of authority and expertise.

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<sup>30</sup> Joose and Hracs, “Curating the Quest for ‘Good Food’,” 211.

<sup>31</sup> Joose and Hracs, “Curating the Quest for ‘Good Food’,” 211.

<sup>32</sup> Joose and Hracs, “Curating the Quest for ‘Good Food’,” 212.

<sup>33</sup> Joose and Hracs, “Curating the Quest for ‘Good Food’,” 212.

<sup>34</sup> Joose and Hracs, “Curating the Quest for ‘Good Food’,” 214.

Despite the shared knowledge and competency in both food preparation and other blogging-related areas and the trust placed in food bloggers as curators, there are detractors that belittle the value of these women. Even the famous food and homestyle guru Martha Stewart questioned the authority of bloggers. In a now infamous October 2013 video interview with Bloomberg TV, Stewart blatantly dismissed food bloggers, saying, “Who are these bloggers? They’re not editors at Vogue magazine...I mean, there are bloggers writing recipes that aren’t tested, that aren’t necessarily very good, or are copies of everything that really good editors have created and done. So, bloggers create kind of a popularity, but they are not the experts.”<sup>35</sup> In addition to hurting and offending a large constituent of her viewers and supporters, these comments seem completely out of touch with a September 2008 episode of the Martha Stewart Cooking School where she highlighted the efforts of various bloggers. In that particular episode, her guests were all bloggers, her audience consisted entirely of bloggers and included some bloggers that were live blogging during the filming of the episode.<sup>36</sup> How could she forget that she had once praised her blogging program guests, especially after taking cookie recipe advice during the September 2008 episode from Matt Armendariz of *Matt’s Bites*<sup>37</sup>? The same *Delish* article that highlights this episode also reminded us that Martha has a blog site of her own where she gives newbies tips on blogging. Perhaps with this disconnect in mind and reeling with hurt from the surprise blow by an often-admired gatekeeper of the world of food and home style, many bloggers and others responded almost unanimously with the sentiment, how dare she discount them?

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<sup>35</sup> Adam Roberts, “Whatever, Martha,” *HuffPost (online newspaper)* (October 23 2013). [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/martha-stewart-bloggers\\_b\\_4144615](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/martha-stewart-bloggers_b_4144615).

<sup>36</sup> Cate O'Malley, “Martha Stewart's Nod to Food Bloggers,” *Delish* (September 17, 2008). <https://www.delish.com/restaurants/a29599/martha-stewarts-nod-to-food-bl/>.

<sup>37</sup> O'Malley, “Martha Stewart’s Nod to Food Bloggers.”

True, few food bloggers are certified chefs or food stylists. However, most, including women blogging about koláče examined in this paper, have developed their skills through years of experience at the sides of experienced family members and through cooking for their own young families and friends. They have also gained the trust and respect of their regular followers during their development as ethnic food curators. Even today in the current versions of Martha's cooking and baking shows airing on PBS stations, she regularly references her Polish mother and grandmother and the food heritage she learned from them. This seems to demonstrate that Stewart is at heart cognizant of the value of family traditions and life experience. Maybe it was a moment of personal weakness where she felt a twinge of jealousy or feared her diminishing internet celebrity...a classic case of foot-in-mouth disease.

This paper uses insight from these scholars and others to analyze food bloggers with entries on koláče. This scholarly literature aids in understanding how women's venues for creative expression were traditionally limited to the domestic sphere. Women still value the influence of family in the development of their cooking and baking skills and domesticity still has a very strong feminine leaning. As Salvio noted, 1950s ideals of feminine domestic perfection still influence modern female food bloggers, but many women are all still searching for the simple comforts of home and a less complicated world in the form of comfort foods like their ancestors made and have either lost the recipe/recipe-maker or have not yet found the right techniques and ingredients to make it look and taste just like she made it. As food curators, food bloggers cultivate an intimacy and trustworthiness with their followers that can certainly explain how they could move from inexperienced food writers to ethnic food experts. As food studies scholar Benay Blend writes, women with immigrant backgrounds write about foodways, "to reclaim a female identity within a specific ethnic heritage. Because recipes, like culture, are

handed down from generation to generation by oral history, culinary literature conveys a sense of how food sharing creates solidarity but also allows women to speak across cultures.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, food bloggers like the ones explored here, can become such trusted experts among communities of women as food curators that their popularity and internet celebrity may threaten existing “traditional” television food celebrities. It is through sharing stories about their lives, their successes and failures, their recommendations for hard-to-find ingredients, and their stories of family and culture, that they create an online environment that encourages their followers to comment and share their own stories that helps build the bloggers’ expertise and trustworthy reputation.

## Blog Analysis

This analysis of food blogs and blog writers is organized by the baked goods their blogs feature. Petra Kupská of *Cook Like Czechs* is the most prolific blog poster with several posts on the different varieties of koláče in the Czech Republic,<sup>39</sup> a couple of posts on kolachi,<sup>40</sup> two posts on koláčky,<sup>41</sup> and a bonus post on *buchty*—baking pan-style dinner roll-shaped buns with any of

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<sup>38</sup> Benay Blend, “In the Kitchen Family Bread is Always Rising: Women's Culture and the Politics of Food,” in *Pilaf, Pozole, and Pad Thai: American Women and Ethnic Food*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2001), 145.

<sup>39</sup> Kupská, “Czech Kolache Authentic Recipe.”

Petra Kupská, “Moravian Kolache - Moravské Koláče,” *Cook Like Czechs*, February 10, 2021, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/moravian-kolache-moravske-kolace/>.

Kupská, “Czech Plum Kolaches.”

Kupská, “Best Poppy Seed Kolache.”

<sup>40</sup> Kupská, “Poppy Seed Roll - Czech Makový Závin.”

Kupská, “Slovak Nut Roll (Orechový Závin).”

<sup>41</sup> Kupská, “Czech Filled Crescent Cookies Recipe.”

the classic koláče fillings encased inside.<sup>42</sup> Petra resides in Chrastava in Northern Bohemia surrounded by the Jizera Mountains of the Czech Republic. The region is known as the Tri-Borders Area of the Czech Republic, Germany, and Poland. In the “About” section of her blog, she indicates that her blog came about as a result of the recent world-wide pandemic where she found herself at home daily with her teenage sons. She focused on trying to prepare comforting and wholesome traditional foods for her children and asked her oldest son to translate her blog posts into English to make them more accessible to worldwide readers who wanted to learn about Czech cuisine. To bolster her cooking expertise and expert knowledge of the cuisine she presents on her blog, she mentions that she is self-taught cook with over 20 years of experience, and has a collection of Czech cookbooks with a lot of Bohemian and Moravian culinary treasures. She has sourced the recipes on the blog from these cookbooks or family tradition, and they have been tried, tested, and approved by her two native teenage sons.<sup>43</sup>

This paper will focus on her posts about koláče, posts on kolachi, and posts on koláčky for what they reveal about how bloggers claim expertise based on their ethnicity and nationality, and on gendered concepts of domesticity. Her first post is titled “Czech Kolache Authentic Recipe (České Koláče).”<sup>44</sup> Petra’s blog is very clean and streamlined. She presents the finished koláče on a white plate painted with tiny pastel flowers, immediately evoking a sense of feminine domesticity. She gives a precise definition of authentic koláče even down to the finished size provided in both metric and customary measurements (8-10 centimeters or 3-4

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Kupská, “Easy Kolacky Cookies.”

<sup>42</sup> Petra Kupská, “*Buchty - Czech Sweet Filled Buns*,” *Cook Like Czechs*, May 17, 2021, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/buchty-czech-sweet-filled-buns/>.

<sup>43</sup> Petra Kupská, “About,” *Cook Like Czechs*, March, 2020, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/about/>.

<sup>44</sup> Kupská, “Czech Kolache Authentic Recipe.”

inches in diameter). She explains that authentic koláče are always round and sweet, never savory. She even provides a pronunciation sound clip to help non-native speakers and the descendants of Czech immigrants pronounce the word correctly. To further help cement her ethnic and cultural credentials as expert, she explains the proper way to transcribe and pluralize koláče into English. Koláč may be transcribed as “kolach” and its plural koláče may be transcribed as “kolache,” but never “kolaches” which is a double plural. Per Petra, authentic koláče fillings are poppy seed,<sup>45</sup> cream cheese,<sup>46</sup> or plum jam.<sup>47</sup> She further establishes her authority by demonstrating her knowledge of historic variations of koláče. The blog post references another post of hers that offers a historic finely diced sweet (white) cabbage filling that might have been familiar to ancestral first-generation Czechs who migrated abroad and has the nutty flavor and texture of coarse grated fresh apple seasoned with cinnamon and fresh ground black pepper.<sup>48</sup> In the discussion section, there are about thirty-five comments from readers who are almost entirely outside her near vicinity. That is, they are attempting to reconnect with food made by loved one who are no longer present, with fond memories of earlier days, and find the missing ingredient or technique in incomplete recipes. Most readers use the

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<sup>45</sup> Petra Kupská, “Poppy Seed Filling Recipe,” *Cook Like Czechs*, March 13, 2020, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/makova-naplň-poppy-seed-filling/>.

<sup>46</sup> Petra Kupská, “Cheese Filling for Sweet Pastries,” *Cook Like Czechs*, March 14, 2020, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/tvarohova-nadivka-farmers-cheese-filling/>.

<sup>47</sup> Petra Kupská, “Plum Butter Filling - Czech Povidlová Náplň,” *Cook Like Czechs*, March 13, 2020, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/povidlova-naplň-plum-butter-filling/>.

<sup>48</sup> Petra Kupská, “Sweet Cabbage Filling,” *Cook Like Czechs*, January 18 2023, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/sweet-cabbage-filling/>.

This ingenious use of mundane cabbage in an unusual, sweet application reminds me of the way a Jewish child described his mother’s cooking as quoted in Gabaccia: “she was ingenious about food, which meant that we did not suffer pangs of hunger, because she could buy a bunch of carrots and two potatoes and an onion, and we would have a vegetable soup. Then she would take those soft vegetables, mash them up with an egg and we would have vegetable cutlets.” Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 179.

comments to thank her for her detailed descriptions and supporting photos. She responds kindly to reader posts offering advice or thoughtful comments. On October 31, 2021, Sandy notes that her “grandma was from Moravia and immigrated to the U. S... Your recipe is very similar to hers. The only difference I could see was she did not use lemon zest but added a pinch of mace instead.”<sup>49</sup> Petra responds,

Ahoj Sandy, thank you for your lovely comment! Czech grannies often add various spices when baking sweet pastries. Freshly grated lemon zest is a common spice nowadays. The mace was one of the spices used in the past, and I can easily imagine it in the dough used to bake kolaches. Other spices previously used in sweet baking in Bohemia and Moravia included cardamom, aniseed, and star anise. The spices not only flavored the pastries but also made them more digestible. Best wishes, Petra.<sup>50</sup>

Many modern authentic recipes flavor the dough with fresh lemon zest, vanilla paste, or vanilla sugar.<sup>51</sup> This is one of the few places where she permits some variation from the modern authentic recipe, but it is done under her expert curation in ways that showcase, again, her culinary authority in her kitchen and in the wider online community her blog serves. It is not so much innovation as recalling flavors of the past that connect readers to loved ones who are no longer with us. Petra is using her combined years of experience eating and preparing authentic Czech cuisine and her access to historical recipes in treasured Czech cookbooks to demonstrate

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<sup>49</sup> Kupská, “Czech Kolache Authentic Recipe.”

<sup>50</sup> Kupská, “Czech Kolache Authentic Recipe.”

I can agree with this from experience. My family’s recipes for *houska* or *Vánočka*, an elaborate braided enriched sweet bread for Christmas, feature lemon zest, and either freshly crushed aniseed or freshly ground mace. My great-grandmother’s Bohemian recipe for *houska* features nutmeg and fresh lemon zest. So, while both recipes have the lemon zest with which Sandy is unfamiliar, one version of *houska* features the mace she recognizes and the aniseed Petra mentions. My aunt who baked with my great-grandmother recalls that she used a base sweet dough that she modified to the needs of the moment. Her simplified *houska* dough might have been used for koláče.

<sup>51</sup> Olga K., “Vanilla Sugar,” *Olga’s Flavor Factory*, February 5, 2014, <https://www.olgasflavorfactory.com/olgastips/kitchen-tips/vanilla-sugar/>.

her insider expert knowledge and to stake a claim over historical knowledge so as to bolster her historical knowledge.

In ways that echo Dejmanee's work on food porn, Petra's classic koláče are decorated in simple and traditional ways that also evoke classic feminine motifs. The sweet cheese topped koláče are decorated with three raisins that are traditionally meant to represent a flower, but they could also be interpreted as a feminine erogenous zone triangle. The luscious plum jam topped koláče have a single blanched almond in the center and could have a couple of feminine interpretations. The koláče topped with the prosperous poppy seed filling are finished with a sprinkling of pale *posypka* or *drobenka* streusel crumb topping.<sup>52</sup>

Petra references *Chodské koláče* of the Chodsko region between Plzeň and the western border with Germany when she is describing the simple decorations on her authentic *České koláče*. Plzeň is the region of origin of another female food blogger who has similarly used food blogs to educate visitors not only about koláče but about the regionally specific cultural traditions that influence their production: Marketa McCall of *Little Bit of Czech Republic*. Marketa in her "About Me" blog page indicates that she was "born and raised in a small town (more like a village to be precise) called Černice, near the city of Plzeň."<sup>53</sup> Like Petra, her authority is not rooted in a fancy culinary degree or extensive experience in restaurants or bakeries; instead, she purposefully produces an easy familiarity with her readers by telling them that her expertise and inspiration is rooted in a love of home cooking, Czech culture, family and traditions. She tells readers: "Don't get too excited. It's just me that we are taking about. I have

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<sup>52</sup> Petra Kupská, "Best Streusel Topping Recipe," *Cook Like Czechs*, March 13, 2020, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/czech-drobenka-streusel-topping/>.

<sup>53</sup> Marketa Mc Call, "About Me," *Little Bit of Czech Republic*, 2024, [https://www.littlebitofczech.com/?page\\_id=318](https://www.littlebitofczech.com/?page_id=318).



no title next to my name, or written accomplishments on a recorded page. My face is not sculpted on a famous statue, it is just me, Marketa.”<sup>54</sup> The Chodsko region is a lovely semi-mountainous area, and its people are fiercely independent, a reflection of the unique rights and privileges of their ancestors.<sup>55</sup> The koláče of this region are legendary. They are more like large cakes or yeast fruit pies at 12 to 14 inches in diameter. They are elaborately filled and decorated with sweet cheese filling, poppy seed filling, plum povidla, blanched almonds, and raisins. In an interview with Daniela Lazarová of Radio Prague International, we learn from Marie Vondrovicová, a bakery owner in the town of Bořice (about 65 km west of Marketa’s Černice and about 4 km southeast of Domažlice, the seat of the Chodsko region), that each woman from the area has her own unique pattern for decorating her koláč.<sup>56</sup> Marketa provides not only the recipe, shaping, and decorating tips for making *Chodské koláče*,<sup>57</sup> but she also provides recipes

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<sup>54</sup> Mc Call, “About Me.”

<sup>55</sup> Amy Tikkanen, “Chodsko,” The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica ed. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, July 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Chodsko>.

The Chods were invited by the medieval monarchy of the Bohemian crown to relocate from the western Carpathian Mountains to the area between Domažlice and the border with Bavaria. They were to patrol the forest and borderlands as guards ensuring the safe passage of merchants between trade towns in both countries. In exchange, they reported directly to the king, did not have a liege lord, had unprecedented free use of the forest bounty, and were not subject to land labor (robota) or military service.

<sup>56</sup> Daniela Lazarová, “Kolace - Delicious, Ornamental Pies that Warm the Heart and Stomach,” *Radio Prague International*, September 1, 2018, <https://english.radio.cz/kolace-delicious-ornamental-pies-warm-heart-and-stomach-8152183>. Bakery owner Vondrovicova comments “I have girls who decorate the koláče and that is an art in itself. Each one has her specific ‘handwriting.’ If you show me one of our koláče I can easily tell you who decorated it. In one hundred koláče you will not find two that are the same.” She also observes that “The Chodsko koláč is like the Chodsko folk costume – covered with flowers and hearts. It reflects the character of the region and its people. They are merry and open-hearted, they like to sing, they enjoy life to the full – and that is exactly what a Chodsko koláč looks like.”

<sup>57</sup> Marketa Mc Call, “Chodské Koláče,” *Little Bit of Czech Republic*, April 25, 2014, <https://www.littlebitofczech.com/?recipe=chodske-kolace>.

for each of the fillings – cream cheese filling,<sup>58</sup> plum filling,<sup>59</sup> and poppy seed filling.<sup>60</sup> Her photo for this page shows four largish looking *Chodské koláče* decorated differently and dusted with powdered sugar. Her standard blog page background is a draped Czech flag, evidencing the way in which bloggers use national symbols to communicate their expertness over ethnic foodways.

Hani of *Haniela's* blog has a post on a multi-topping koláče that demonstrates yet another version of a casual and personal blogging style.<sup>61</sup> Unlike Petra and Marketa, Hani did not intend for her blog to be a source for all things ethnic Czech. She began her blog in 2010 to share her recipes and cookie decorating ideas. In fact, a large portion of her blog is dedicated to the cookie decorating that she has been doing since 2008 and includes tips, trick, recipes, and ideas. Further examination of the blog reveals that she has some Czech and possibly Slovak ancestry. Her expertise in Czech and Slovak cuisine comes from learning from her mother and grandmother. Her “Kolache Recipe” post starts with a reference to her standard “Sweet Bread Dough recipe.”<sup>62</sup> She uses this dough for most of her sweet yeast dough needs like what she calls Moravian Kolache and Petra might call *České koláče*. Her “Sweet Bread Dough” which contains the usual ingredients for an enriched sweet yeast dough—all-purpose flour, dry yeast, granulated sugar,

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<sup>58</sup> Marketa Mc Call, “Tvarohová Náplň - Cheesecake Filling,” *Little Bit of Czech Republic*, April 22, 2014, <https://www.littlebitofczech.com/?recipe=tvarohova-napln-cheesecake-filling>.

<sup>59</sup> Marketa Mc Call, “Švestková Povidla – Plum Sauce,” *Little Bit of Czech Republic*, April 23, 2014, <https://www.littlebitofczech.com/?recipe=svestkova-povidla-plum-sauce>.

<sup>60</sup> Marketa Mc Call, “Maková Náplň – Poppy Seed Filling,” *Little Bit of Czech Republic*, April 25, 2014, <https://www.littlebitofczech.com/?recipe=makova-napln-poppy-seen-filling>.

<sup>61</sup> Haniela (Hani) Bacova, “Kolache Recipe,” *Haniela's - Recipes, Cookie, & Cake Decorating Tutorials*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.hanielas.com/moravian-kolache/#savory-kolache-topping>.

<sup>62</sup> Haniela (Hani) Bacova, “Sweet Bread Dough,” *Haniela's - Recipes, Cookie, & Cake Decorating Tutorials*, May 6, 2019, <https://www.hanielas.com/hanis-soft-yeast-dough/>.

warm milk, unsalted butter, egg yolks, vanilla extract, and salt—departs from ingredients that her Czech immigrant ancestors would have used but is a standard base dough repeated in some of the Ukrainian blogs. For her “Kolache Recipe,” Hani offers three ways to shape and fill the koláče. Her method for a two-toppings filling involves rolling out the dough to about 3/8-inch thick and, using a round cookie or biscuit cutter, cuts out 2.5-to-3-inch circles. After letting them rest for a few minutes, she uses a flat-bottomed glass or measuring cup to flatten the center of each to make a wide well with a narrow rim for filling. She tops each with cheese filling made from her tvaroh recipe and povidla filling and sprinkles each generously with posypka/drobenka or streusel.<sup>63</sup> She then lets it rise for half an hour before baking. She has only one comment from Mark in September of 2022 who was delighted with the recipe and the praise of his “taste testers.” She references her grandmother’s special trick in the FAQ section of the post. This could be an attempt to bolster her generational or inherited expertise from a knowledgeable and talented baker.

Like Hani, Kristýna Koutná of Czech Cookbook shows how for women writing in English and living outside their country of birth, food blogs provide mediums for keeping cultural traditions alive—traditions often passed on via women in home kitchens—while adjusting them for a multicultural audience without access to homeland ingredients. Both women demonstrate the communal nature of passing on culinary traditions, a theme central to food studies’ scholars work on gender, ethnicity, and foodways. Benay Blend, in her study of ethnic women food writers, notes that such women use their writing to navigate between both self-personal identities and histories and the more collective or communal histories of their larger

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<sup>63</sup> Haniela (Hani) Bacova, “Farmer’s Cheese,” *Haniela’s - Recipes, Cookie, & Cake Decorating Tutorials*, 2010, <https://www.hanielas.com/how-to-make-farmers-cheese/>.

families, communities, and home countries. She writes, “Particularly for ethnic women writers, reproducing a recipe, like retelling a story, requires that they maneuver between personal and collective texts, between an autobiographical ‘I’ and various forms of a political/cultural ‘we.’”<sup>64</sup> Kristýna’s primary post on koláče is titled “Traditional Kolache – *Tradiční Koláče*.”<sup>65</sup> Her mission statement from her “About” page is to make Czech recipes and ingredients substitutions more accessible to English speakers with Czech heritage living outside the Czech Republic. When she moved to the United States, she realized how hard it was to find familiar ingredients that she was used to using in recipes she had been making from childhood. She reasoned correctly that Czech descendants living abroad trying to rediscover tastes from their childhood and recreate lost recipes from modern Czech cookbooks would likely stumble over the metric system and the confusing descriptions of different types of flour.<sup>66</sup>

To help make her recipes exceptionally accessible, Kristýna lists the ingredients, total servings, and timings on her blog page and then links to imbedded YouTube videos of her making the item in her home in California. This way she can show viewers exactly how to make the item in a typical American kitchen using customary measuring devices. She also endeavors to anticipate viewers questions in her videos and has answers ready to the most asked questions. In her video for Traditional Kolache, she has all her ingredients premeasured and lined up on her kitchen island in the classic French-style of *mise en place*, or everything ready and in place, before she starts cooking. She is not a formally trained chef, but she has been studying cooking from Czech cookbooks and learning at the elbow of her mother and grandmother since she was a

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<sup>64</sup> Blend, “In the Kitchen Family Bread is Always Rising: Women's Culture and the Politics of Food,” 147.

<sup>65</sup> Kristýna Koutná, “Traditional Kolache – Tradiční Koláče,” *Czech Cookbook*, September 10, 2014, <https://www.czechcookbook.com/kolache-recipe-kolace/>

<sup>66</sup> Kristýna Koutná, “About,” *Czech Cookbook*, ?, <https://www.czechcookbook.com/about>.

child. She adds authority to her presentation by adopting this common practice of professional chefs and commercial kitchens. She also introduces her guest viewers to each of the ingredients and their measurements before she begins to cook. She reminds them that the ingredients are all listed on her blog page so that when her viewers are ready to try the recipe in their own kitchens they can premeasure and have everything ready to follow along with her in the video as they cook, too. This method takes the place of step-by-step screen shots of the typical cooking blog. It invites the viewer into her home to cook beside her as if the viewer is a friend or cousin. It is the most domestic and homey experience possible in a virtual interaction. This direct link to the video is where Kristýna differs from Hani's standard method. Hani did eventually post links to accompanying videos on YouTube, but most of her recipe posts start with the step-by-step photos and explanation with an attached simplified print version of the recipe.

In her video, Kristýna breaks down the full process of making koláče and three of the toppings into smaller easier to follow segments. She demonstrates first how to make the sweet, enriched dough. She begins by blooming the yeast followed by preparing the dry ingredients for the dough to include adding a stick of softened butter. Once the yeast-milk-sugar mixture is foamy, she adds it to the dry ingredients, and mixes first with a large wooden spoon in a moment that harkens back to the pre-stand mixture days of our grandmothers.<sup>67</sup> Kristýna also pays

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<sup>67</sup> This is often still the method preferred by the grandmotherly figures I have interviewed or about whom I have watched interviews.

Carol Niemann Louis of Nebraska kolache fame has published three cookbooks on baked goods using one or more of her blue-ribbon sweet-enriched dough recipes for kolache and other baked treats. She is also a proponent of using a base sweet dough for many applications. She also has a DVD in which she demonstrates her no fail kolache dough recipe which she mixes half with an electric hand mixer and half by hand. She combines the modern proclivity for listing measurements for each of her ingredients, but as she demonstrates in the video, when you mix by hand, you are more in-tune with the dough, and you will know when to add more or less flour or liquids. This can vary based on weather outside and in-home climate control. She even advocates for using almost twice the typical amount of yeast in her dough and doing the first dough proof in a warm water bath in your kitchen sink. This warm water bath is meant to mimic hot summer days on the plains of Nebraska and kitchens heated by wood- or corn-cob-burning iron stoves in leu of modern air-conditioned homes. Yeast dough likes a nice warm environment to rise and get nice and fluffy. The reason for the double yeast? The fresh yeast our grandparents used was more alive and active than modern dry active yeast. Doubling the yeast means more air and volume in the

homage to grandmothers and an earlier cozier domestic age by rocking a feminine full apron covered in red and white hearts.<sup>68</sup> Once the dough gets to a shaggy stage, she removes the spoon and moves to using her hands to mix in the remaining flour and to knead it lightly until a soft supple dough ball forms.<sup>69</sup> She covers the bowl with a tea towel and sets it aside to rise for an hour. While the dough is rising, she moves on to the sweet cheese filling. Like many recent immigrants from central and eastern Europe, she prefers to make her tvaroh, or farmer's cheese, at home from scratch rather than use store bought cottage cheese, cream cheese, or ricotta when

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dough, which makes for a lighter more tender kolache. She was a delight to interview via Zoom and was kind enough to send me her complete published works for my personal cookbook collection and academic study. Carol J. (Maca) Louis, *Czech This Out: State Fair Prize Winning Recipes - Life's Experiences & Insights - Inspirational Thoughts*, 3 vols., vol. I (Kerney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2006); Carol J. (Maca) Louis, *Czech This Out: State Fair Winning Cookies & More - Authentic Recipes from Czechoslovakia - Parenting Styles, Tips & Insights - Fun Things for Kids to Eat and Do*, 3 vols., vol. II (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2007); Carol J. (Maca) Louis, *Czech This Out: State Fair Winning Recipes from Vol. I, II with Many New Recipes - Step by Step Instruction on Making Yeast Dough and Apple Strudel Successfully - Inspirations to Live What Is Inside of You*, 3 vols., vol. III (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2020); Carol J. (Maca) Louis, *Czech This Out: Dough Therapy - Kneading Your Stress Away - Learning a New Skill - Rolling in the Dough - Making Beautiful Creations - Raising Your Self-Esteem - Taking Pride in Your Work* (Lincoln, NE: Czech This Out dot biz, 2006).

JoAnn Vogel head kolache baker of the Northeastern WI Kolache and Czech insisted that industrial dough mixers like the classic Hubbard are too rough, and they produce a tough dough. She demands that all the dough for the festival kolache sales be mixed by hand with wooden spoons by volunteers on her baking teams. Daniel Higgins, "Queen of the Kolache: When It Comes to the Traditional Czech Treat, Few Can Match JoAnn Vogel's Experience," *Post Crescent* (Appleton, WI), May 6 2014, <https://www.postcrescent.com/story/news/2014/05/07/queen-of-the-kolache-when-it-comes-to-the-traditional-czech-treat-few-can-match-joann-vogels-experience-8766477/>.

<sup>68</sup> For a time, one of Kristýna's side hustles on her online store was a collection of vintage-style kitchen aprons in sweet and feminine colors and patterns with some even trimmed in lace or ruffles. The aprons were similar to those found on the Hyzrz store page on Amazon.com.

[https://www.amazon.com/stores/Hyzrz/page/1D623D1C-0FB0-4A6D-B6A6-AE12405DB4D3?ref\\_=ast\\_bln&store\\_ref=bl\\_ast\\_dp\\_brandLogo\\_sto](https://www.amazon.com/stores/Hyzrz/page/1D623D1C-0FB0-4A6D-B6A6-AE12405DB4D3?ref_=ast_bln&store_ref=bl_ast_dp_brandLogo_sto)

Kristýna's Amazon.com store is RedLev. It currently features her hardcover book *Czech Cookbook: Recipes and Stories, Volume 1* (it features her traditional koláče and her homemade tvaroh recipes), her Kindle eBook *Czech Cookbook Christmas Baking – Traditions – Stories*, three set of Czech-style folk art cookie cutters, four specialty forms or molds for Czech cookies and confections, a specialty potato and egg chopper, an egg separator/powder sugar sprinkler, a metal slotted-spatula perfect for flipping and lifting *domácí knedlíky* (steamed or simmered yeast-raised dumplings; It also features in her recipe video for these dumplings.), four branded Czech Cookbook enameled mugs, and Josef Lada mini calendar (Lada is a famed early 20<sup>th</sup> century Czech folk artist and illustrator noted for his depictions of traditional life in Bohemia and Moravia.)

[https://www.amazon.com/stores/RedLev/page/99D94793-1D15-422A-8107-3BC4F3F9172A?ref\\_=ast\\_bln](https://www.amazon.com/stores/RedLev/page/99D94793-1D15-422A-8107-3BC4F3F9172A?ref_=ast_bln)

<sup>69</sup> Where my mother taught me to grease or oil the cleaned mixing bowl for the first rising of yeast doughs, Kristýna prefers to flour the bowl and dough ball to prevent sticking.

she cannot find soft farmer's cheese in the local store.<sup>70</sup> This speaks to the idea mentioned earlier in the Joose and Hrac's article "Curating the Quest for 'Good Food'," where diligent ethnic food bloggers will curate means for their followers to locate, obtain, or make hard-to-find quality ingredients to create an enjoyable authentic food experience. This is a theme repeated in many koláče food blogs examined for this paper. She next demonstrates a very simple method for making fresh poppy seed filling using a simple electric blade coffee grinder that many have standard in their homes. She dry-grinds the seeds in batches. She mentions the classic purpose-designed manual poppy seed grinder that is common in central and eastern European kitchens. The electric coffee grinder works, but the specialized tool is better, if available, she reminds her viewers. This is a curated method for her bloggers to use, especially if they have trouble obtaining the specialized tool or they prefer a more versatile option. Her recipe for poppy seed filling is very simple – ground poppy seeds, milk, powdered sugar, and raisins cooked on a stove. When the dough is ready, she divides it into three even pieces and sets the other two balls aside to rest while she further divides first ball into six even pieces. This should produce about eighteen 3-inch koláče. She is not worried about weighing each piece to ensure they are all even in size. Dividing by is good enough as she learned from previous generations. This is a very lived experience kind of knowledge, passed on from generation to generation in a domestic kitchen, and less a professional approach. To shape the koláče, she uses a very practical flat-bottomed glass dipped in flour to firmly press down a wide well in the center of the individual

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<sup>70</sup> This is a good beginner recipe for making farmer's cheese. She uses just two simple ingredients – a half gallon of whole milk and the juice of two lemons or about ¼ cup of lemon juice. Kristýna Koutná, "Homemade Farmer's Cheese – Domáci tvaroh," *Czech Cookbook*, February 20, 2014, <https://www.czechcookbook.com/homemade-farmers-cheese-domaci-tvaroh/>.

dough balls.<sup>71</sup> She mentions that her favorite combination is half poppy seed filling and half cheese filling. To fill the koláče, she uses various combinations of the cheese filling, the poppyseed filling, and store-bought blueberry or plum jams. Like Hani and unlike Petra, she is not worried about the jam leaking out. She just sprinkles on extra drobenka crumbs.

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<sup>71</sup> Koláče bakers are clever and ingenious. As domestic goddesses, they either craft clever workarounds for making the wells in koláče for the filling or they find someone with the woodworking skills to fashion them a dedicated tool for the job.

A common method is to roll out the dough in a big sheet and use a glass or round cutter to cut individual pieces and press their centers with a flat-bottomed glass or measuring cup like Hani did for her twice topped koláče. Bacova, “Kolache Recipe.”

You could also cut small-portioned balls from a larger ball and let them rest, then flatten the wells with a glass dipped in flour. Petra Kupská uses a flat-bottomed measuring cup wrapped in a tea towel to flatten the well on the individual balls.

Kupská, “Czech Kolache Authentic Recipe.”

In the store of a Czech and Slovak genealogy conference in October 2019, the Czech and Slovak Educational Center and Cultural Museum in Omaha, NE sold kolache stompers – a pair of unfinished graduated circles of unfinished smooth grain wood with wooden handles. It was handcrafted by a local Omaha Czech artist. As instructed, you use the individual ball method to divide your dough. After the dough balls have risen, you use the larger “stomper” to press the ball to the thickness you want to the edges to have, then you use the smaller stomper to press the center well to the depth you prefer. To keep the stompers from sticking, you do one or a combination of the following: pre-oil the stompers in food grade mineral oil to condition them, paint or varnish them in a food-grade paint or varnish, wrap them in a tea towel, dip them in flour, or coat them in butter, vegetable oil, or a rendered animal grease/fat. On the November 6, 2023 Facebook post of the Czech and Slovak Educational Center and Cultural Museum in Omaha, NE gift shop offerings, a pair are displayed with Christmas ornaments, a feather pastry brush, and a pair of wooden spatulas.

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=844917650967854&set=pcb.844918210967798>

The smaller one is demonstrated in a later photo within this same string of giftshop offerings.

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=844917664301186&set=pcb.844918210967798>

Here is a wooden tart tamper available on Amazon.com that would work for creating the well in koláče with a finished diameter of at least 4.25 inches.

<https://www.amazon.com/Hemoton-Tampers-Wooden-Kitchen-Restaurant/dp/B08N4DS18M>

In the 2001 edition of *Czech & Slovak Kolaches & Sweet Treats* (a mini flip book of collected recipes), the editors cite a cloth depressor idea previously published in a cookbook by Helen Fiala of Phillips, Wisconsin. In the flip book version, “Make a cloth depressor to press down centers. Cut a 7-inch square of cloth. Put 2 rounded tablespoons of flour in the center of cloth and twist ends together to make a tight ball. Secure tightly with string or a plastic bag twisty tie to make a compressed ball. Use for pressing down uniform centers. May be placed in a plastic bag and stored in freezer for reuse.”

Museum Guild of the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, *Czech & Slovak Kolaches & Sweet Treats*.

The original instructions by Helen Fiala in *The Best Czech Cooking and Collected Recipes of Helen Fiala* are very similar to the directions in the mini flip book, minus the storage guideline.

Fiala, *The Best Czech Cooking and Collected Recipes of Helen Fiala*, 102.



Kristýna's blog presents an excellent opportunity to explore how comments sections provide a forum for bloggers to have a temporally and geographically extended conversation with their users. These conversations, in addition to videos, texts, photographs, and other elements in the blogs, are opportunities for women to further perform a gendered expertise around food and ethnicity. Bloggers use comments sections to justify their teaching methods, explain ingredient choices and recipe variations, and praise or correct their blog followers in ways that show the give-and-take, back-and-forth quality of a blog, rather than a one-way flow of information from blogger to blog readers. For example, Peg responds to Kristýna's "Traditional Kolache – *Tradiční Koláče*" recipe by insisting that Kristýna's provide the detailed instructions for the recipe written down so she can read them rather than follow along with the video. Kristýna apologizes, but states that she is not planning to post the instructions to the blog. Instead, she is working on a Kindle e-book that will have detailed instructions. She will eventually publish the cookbook into a hard copy that can be purchased. In the meantime, she suggests that Peg repeat the lessons of others and pause the video to take notes and skip ahead when she doesn't need to watch a segment. This illustrates her commitment to her chosen method of blogging and teaching style; she prefers to demonstrate directly and to encourage a sense of community and interaction that feels more engaging than the static environment found in a standard written instruction format.

On September 28, 2014, Ann is the first to post that she understands and appreciates Kristýna's detailed videos for her traditional kolache. She writes,

Kristýna, In the beginning when I started watching I thought your YouTube videos were longer than most food videos. However, you are so informative, I find you answer any food preparation questions I had. I wish other food youtubers could be as thorough as you...and your blog has help fill in gaps food wise as my grandmother didn't reference her dishes ethnically (cabbage rolls were called pigs in the blanket in my family!) I have the Czechoslovak

Cookbook by Joza Bizova [Břízová], which is ok but she assumes everyone is familiar with these dishes and details are a bit lacking. Keep up the good work.<sup>72</sup>

Kristýna's enthusiastic response gives her the opportunity to legitimize her teaching methods and paint herself in a positive light as a reliable, dedicated teacher. After thanking Ann, she writes, "I am perfectionist and into details. I want everyone to be able to recreate all of my recipes. I never assume people know even simplest things in cooking." Ann's reference to another Czech cookbook gives Kristýna the added chance to not only connect with Ann over their shared culinary books but portray her methods and recipes as superior and more effective. She continues, "I got same cookbook from Joza Bizova [Břízová], so I know what is out there and I know exactly what you're talking about. It is very frustrating when people skip lots of important details."<sup>73</sup>

It is in the comments section that we also see how much of a link she forges with her blog followers and users, fellow "people who grew up eating Kolaches"—the very descendants of Czech immigrants worldwide she hopes to reach. On January 11, 2015, Patrick writes about her traditional kolache recipe:

I live in Nebraska, and there are a lot of people who grew up eating Kolaches here. I've made these for family events, to bring to work, and for friends - and I haven't stopped getting compliments! I've easily made over 300 of these total just in the last 3-4 months, believe it or not. This recipe has gotten the approval of so many people, and I can't thank you enough. I even gave one to someone who swore up and down they didn't like kolaches, and now he won't stop begging for more! I've tried a bunch of recipes from your site and not one has let me down. Thank you so much for taking the time to share!<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Koutná, "Traditional Kolache – Tradiční Koláče."

<sup>73</sup> Koutná, "Traditional Kolache – Tradiční Koláče."

<sup>74</sup> Koutná, "Traditional Kolache – Tradiční Koláče."

Kristýna's response commends Patrick's prodigious kolache output, while not so subtly pointing to a sense of ownership over the kolache recipes. She responds ecstatically, "Thank you so much Patrick for taking the time and sharing this with me. I love it! That is a lots of kolache you made...It makes me so glad to hear how many people are sharing and enjoying my kolache recipes I worked so hard to create."<sup>75</sup> Comments from her blog posts suggest that Kristýna is serving in the role of curator as understood by Joosse and Hrac; she is meeting her goal of curating and sharing authentic recipes, based on her own ethnic culture, that both a modern native of Czechia and a descendant of Czech immigrants to America can recognize, appreciate, and replicate with success and confidence.<sup>76</sup> She does this through her recipes, videos, her personal stories, and her exchanges with blog readers, all of which affirm her knowledge and competency and allow her to build and grow community through food. Other koláče bloggers express their ethnic and gendered identities not by focusing on "authentic" ingredients and detailed and time-intensive baking techniques but by instead highlighting practicality, ease, and accessibility as keys to using food to sustain family and community. This is seen in a recipe for a two-topping koláče by Valentina of *Valentina's Corner*.<sup>77</sup> She is from a large Ukrainian family that immigrated to the United States in the late 1980s. She lives in Ohio with her husband and seven children. She has a degree in Residential Planning and Interior Design which influences her blog styling. Her cuisine reflects the dishes of her youth—Ukrainian and Russian—and the dishes of her Uzbekistani in-laws. Of particular interest for this paper is Valentina's "Cherry Cheesecake Buns (Video)."<sup>78</sup> Her fellow immigrants from Ukraine, like Natasha Kravchuk of

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<sup>75</sup> Koutná, "Traditional Kolache – Tradiční Koláče."

<sup>76</sup> Joosse and Hrac, "Curating the Quest for 'Good Food'," 214.

<sup>77</sup> Valentina, "About," *Valentina's Corner*, 2019, <https://valentinascorner.com/about/>.

*Natasha's Kitchen*,<sup>79</sup> Natalya Drozhzhin of *Momdsish*,<sup>80</sup> or Olga of *Olga in the Kitchen*,<sup>81</sup> would likely call these vatrushkas. Although they are a different name than koláče and vatrushka comes from a different root word in the Eastern Slavic family of languages, these are still at their core essence koláče.<sup>82</sup> Vatrushkas are made from a sweet enriched dough, they are often shaped in the round, and they usually have a deep impression into which a variety of fillings may be deposited like sweet cheese filling, cherry filling, or poppyseed filling. Valentina has chosen to include two fillings like Petra, Hani, Marketa, and Kristyna. However, unlike Petra, Hani, Kristyna, Natasha, Natalya, and Olga of *Olga in the Kitchen*, she does not provide a recipe for farmer's cheese/tvaroh/*tvorog* to use in her cheese filling. Valentina is much too busy with her large young family to make this specialty product or to try to source it in Ohio. She uses sweetened cream cheese and canned cherry pie filling. For her, domesticity is more about being present for her growing family, rather than curating specialty ingredients to meet an exacting standard of authenticity. From her "About" page, she states "most of our recipes use minimal

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<sup>78</sup> Valentina, "Cherry Cheesecake Buns (Video)," *Valentina's Corner*, May 11, 2017, <https://valentinascorner.com/cherry-cheesecake-buns/>.

<sup>79</sup> Natasha Kravchuk, "Sweet Cherry Filled Buns (Vatrushka Recipe)," *Natasha's Kitchen*, April 7, 2018, <https://natashaskitchen.com/sweet-cherry-filled-buns-vatrushka-recipe/>.

<sup>80</sup> Natalya Drozhzhin, "Russian Creamcheese Vatrushka Buns," *Momdsish*, May 28, 2019, <https://momdsish.com/recipe/235/russian-cream-cheese-vatrushka-buns>.

<sup>81</sup> Olga, "Sweet Cheese Filled Buns (Vatrushka)," *Olga in the Kitchen*, June 27, 2023, <https://www.olgainthekitchen.com/sweet-cheese-filled-buns/>.

<sup>82</sup> Belarus Russian, Ukrainian, and Russian belong to the Eastern Slavic language family. Czech, Polish, and Slovak are members of the Western Slavic language family. Rusyn sort of rides the fence as a language. In areas where Rusyns reside and a member of the Western Slavic language family is the dominate language, they will tend to have more loan words from them and will use an adapted latinized alphabet similar to their Czech, Polish, or Slovak neighbors. However, those residing in Ukrainian- or Russian-speaking areas will use an adapted Cyrillic alphabet similar to their neighbors and they will have more loan words from these languages. There is also a Southern Slavic language family that consists of the Slavic languages of former Yugoslavia and Bulgarian. All three branches are descendant of Proto-Slavic, which language scholars believe may have resembled Old Church Slavonic – the source of our good friend *kolo*.

ingredients that you most likely already have in the kitchen, making dinnertime so much easier!”<sup>83</sup> So, we learn that she values simplicity over strict authenticity. Her dough making and shaping instructions are thorough and she seems to mix the dough by hand rather than using a stand mixer like Natasha or a bread machine like Olga to mix the dough ingredients. She is not as well-publicized as Natasha or Olga who both have a lot of sponsors, especially Natasha whose “About” page has thousands of posts since it began in 2010 to the present.<sup>84</sup> This could be due in part to Valentina’s family eschewal of the television; they don’t own one, and they have no intention of bringing one into their home. Like most of the other bloggers examined in depth for this paper, Valentina is not worried about getting on the latest talk show or making some talk show host’s list of favorites.

That food blogging is sometimes a dynamic two-way exchange of ideas and techniques can be seen in the way bloggers’ respond and react to questions from viewers. In some cases, it is clear that bloggers’ recipes themselves are responses to questions from viewers. For example, Petra of *Cooks Like Czechs* provided a recipe for “Homemade Czech Tvaroh Cheese” (October 2022),<sup>85</sup> only after receiving a comment about the challenges of finding tvaroh or an American equivalent soft fresh farmer’s cheese.<sup>86</sup> Before posting her homeland tvaroh recipe Natasha instead had only a recipe for “Cheese Filling for Sweet Pastries” made from store brought tvaroh. On May 1, 2022, Ben also posts about the recipes for homemade tvaroh: “so excited to see this recipe! Trying it out right now – we are in America, so we don’t have quark. Wonder if creme

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<sup>83</sup> Valentina, “About,” *Valentina’s Corner*, 2024, <https://valentinascorner.com/about>.

<sup>84</sup> Natasha Kravchuk, “About,” *Natasha’s Kitchen*, February 16, 2010, <https://www.natashaskitchen.com/about/>.

<sup>85</sup> Petra Kupská, “Homemade Czech Tvaroh Cheese,” *Cook Like Czechs*, October 12, 2022, <https://www.cooklikeczechs.com/how-to-make-tvaroh/>.

<sup>86</sup> Kupská, “Homemade Czech Tvaroh Cheese.”

cheese or Greek yogurt would be the better substitution.”<sup>87</sup> Natasha demonstrated an interest in and commitment to her larger community of blog visitors by using her culinary expertise and cultural background to offer recipes in demand by trusting followers. As seen in the example above, Natasha is a good example of a blogger who, by expression her cultural identity in the public forum of the food blog, allows blog users and visitors to also rediscover and strengthen their ethnic ties to loved ones and communities in other places and times.

In order to better understand how different bloggers approach the issue of authenticity and while the topic of tvaroh is still fresh, let us pause a moment to look at the special assembly of the *Moravské koláče*, or *dvojtihodné* (two different fillings) *koláče* that uses tvaroh either on top or inside depending on your experience and family traditions.<sup>88</sup> Ever our friendly gatekeeper of authentic koláče, Petra gives a very precise description, stating that with this special style of koláče, “you will [traditionally] find creamy cheese filling inside, usually made from Czech tvaroh, which is a type of fresh cheese. Plum jam is then placed on the top and the whole beauty is sprinkled with streusel topping (drobenka).”<sup>89</sup> She further instructs, if your jam is “too thin or runny, add gingerbread crumbs (that is how plum jam is thickened in the Czech Republic.”<sup>90</sup> Hani also provides instructions on making Moravian koláče—“kolache with filling and topping.”<sup>91</sup> However, because her experience is different from Petra’s she is not quite as

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<sup>87</sup> Kupská, “Homemade Czech Tvaroh Cheese.”

<sup>88</sup> Kupská, “Moravian Kolache - Moravské Koláče.”

<sup>89</sup> Kupská, “Moravian Kolache - Moravské Koláče.”

Kupská, “Best Streusel Topping Recipe.”

<sup>90</sup> Kupská, “Moravian Kolache - Moravské Koláče.”

<sup>91</sup> Bacova, “Kolache Recipe.”

stringent in how the koláče must be filled and topped. Hani writes “my grandmother made Kolache with jam filling and cheese topping with raisins on the top. My friend's mom makes them with cheese filling and jam - streusel topping. And my in-laws make them with a topping only.”<sup>92</sup> She further demonstrates her relaxed approach when it comes time to assemble her version of this koláče as her step-by-step photos show a mix of different jams—apricot jam, blueberry filling, and plum butter—and sweetened farmer’s cheese filling serving as the inside filling with the opposite (jam or cheese) providing the topping for her *Moravské koláče*. This shows that for Hani traditional and authentic are more fluid concepts. She gives her readers room to experiment and find what combinations they like best and what they prefer on top versus inside. She is less the gatekeeper of the single path that Petra seems to be and more of a guiding life-coach that gives her readers options.

One area where both bloggers and blog readers seem to struggle with agreement is the topic of poppyseed filling. Some strict traditionalists imply that the best texture and flavor comes from poppyseeds that are ground in a traditional hand-cranked purpose-specific poppy seed grinder. Others like Kristýna Koutná of *Czech Cookbook*, who offers the easy to find electric blade-style coffee grinder, are willing to find easier alternatives that will do in a pinch.<sup>93</sup> Our normally strict traditionalist, Petra Kupská uses pre-ground poppy seeds that she purchased to make the filling for her “Best Poppy Seed Kolaches,” but she acknowledges that it may be

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<sup>92</sup> Bacova, “Kolache Recipe.”

<sup>93</sup> Koutná, “Traditional Kolache – Tradiční Koláče.”

Natasha Kravchuk, “How to Make Poppy Seed Filling,” *Natasha's Kitchen*, September 22, 2014, <https://natashaskitchen.com/how-to-make-poppy-seed-filling/>.

Olga K., “Homemade Poppy Seed Filling,” *Olga's Flavor Factory*, December 13, 2023, <https://www.olgasflavorfactory.com/recipes/russianrecipes/homemade-poppy-seed-filling/>.

hard to find such a specialty product in all countries so also proffers the electric coffee grinder as an alternative.<sup>94</sup> Petra even offers readers the option of buying canned poppyseed filling like Solo Brand canned cake and pastry fillings.<sup>95</sup> Natasha of *Natasha's Kitchen* will use a clean electric coffee grinder in a pinch, but she prefers to use the meat grinder attachment on her stand mixer because she thoroughly rinses her seeds before she grinders them and coffee grinders don't process wet seeds well.<sup>96</sup> Not surprisingly, Valentina opts for the jarred or canned filling.<sup>97</sup> Marketa grinds hers in a blender or a coffee grinder.<sup>98</sup> Olga of *Olga's Flavor Factory* swears by the coffee grinder.<sup>99</sup> Natalya of *MomSDish* is the most resourceful. She provides instructions for grinding them in a food processor, coffee grinder, high-speed blender, in a mortar and with a pestle, or if you are really desperate in plastic zippered bag with a meat mallet.<sup>100</sup> She also give permission to buy it ready made. For Petra's *Cook Like Czechs*, there are no comments from her readers in the discussion for the "Best Poppy Seed Kolache Recipe" but there are several on her "Poppy Seed Filling Recipe." The biggest challenges facing her readers making fresh poppy seed filling in the United States is finding the best method to grind them fresh *and* sourcing large quantities of whole poppy seed. Many resort to work arounds for the grinding and those that can't obtain the poppyseeds will make do with canned poppy seed filling. However, canned

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<sup>94</sup> Kupská, "Best Poppy Seed Kolache."

<sup>95</sup> Kupská, "Poppy Seed Roll - Czech Makový Závín."

<sup>96</sup> Kravchuk, "How to Make Poppy Seed Filling."

<sup>97</sup> Valentina, "Poppy Seed Roll with Cream Cheese (Video)," *Valentina's Corner*, February 16, 2018, <https://www.valentinascorner.com/poppy-seed-cream-cheese-roll/>.

<sup>98</sup> Mc Call, "Maková Náplň – Poppy Seed Filling."

<sup>99</sup> Olga K., "Homemade Poppy Seed Filling."

<sup>100</sup> Natalya Drozhzhin, "Poppy Seed Filling Recipe," *MomSDish*, February 19, 2022, <https://momsdish.com/recipe/307/poppy-seeds>.



filling will never satisfy ultra purists like Jesk on December 25, 2022, “Be forewarned, store-bought canned filling is hardly worth it; it's overly sweet and lacks a depth of flavor. Once, my grandma switched to canned in a pinch and that batch lost a certain specialness of homemade. It's worth it to go homemade, since you're already fussing with kolacy [koláčky] or buchty anyway.”<sup>101</sup> Whether he realized or not, Jesk in just a few sentences has maligned his own grandmother's storied expertise, questioned Petra's gendered ethnic authority over poppy seed filling, and discounted canned filling as an inferior substitution unworthy to grace lovingly made koláče or buchty. These examples show how bloggers' authority is not sacrosanct; the blogosphere presents readers and users with myriads of options, and users, as seen by Jesk, bring their own culinary traditions and memories to bear on what they consider to be tasty and authentic.

As the poppyseed filling debate shows, offering recipes for homemade koláče fillings and toppings is clearly one way that bloggers signal their culinary competence, present their recipes as authentic, while harkening back to romanticized images of a pre-industrial food system. Blog entries on single-topping vatrushka of *Natasha's Kitchen*, *Olga in the Kitchen*, and *Momdsdish* demonstrate this. Natasha presents a very enticing sweet cherry-filled version with a crumb topping. In a major nod to the domestic goddess she is, the cherries come from her very own cherry trees.<sup>102</sup> Olga's “Sweet Cheese Filled Buns (Vatrushka)”<sup>103</sup> undoubtedly feature her homemade “tvorog” plus a bit more sugar than our Czech friends would add to sweeten up the

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<sup>101</sup> Kupská, “Poppy Seed Filling Recipe.”

<sup>102</sup> Kravchuk, “Sweet Cherry Filled Buns (Vatrushka Recipe).”

<sup>103</sup> Olga, “Sweet Cheese Filled Buns (Vatrushka).”

filling.<sup>104</sup> Olga has several pages more of comments than Natasha. However, most of the comments are nothing but praise for both bloggers. Natalya also used her own homemade *tvorog* in her Russian “Creamcheese Vatrushka Buns.”<sup>105</sup> She adds golden raisins to her cheese filling in an unconscious nod to Kristyna’s traditional koláče and she high fives Valentina by also adding cream cheese along with her tvorog.<sup>106</sup> Natalya only has one comment on her vatrushka post, but she has several comments in the discussion section of her “Easy Homemade Farmer’s Cheese Recipe” in response to which she offers guidance on appropriate substitutions and recipe adjustments as she helps her readers curate their best experience making homemade tvorog.<sup>107</sup> In addition, Natalya and Natasha illustrate the closeness of the community they create by demonstrating that ethnic food bloggers read each other’s blogs. Such as when Natalya posted to Natasha’s “Farmers Cheese Tvorog Recipe” on February 7, 2012, that she thought about posting her recipe for tvorog on the same day Natasha first posted her recipe. They had a good chuckle.<sup>108</sup>

Contrastingly, female bloggers don’t necessarily have to have roots in the culture whose cuisines they blog about. As Tori Avery of *Tori Avery* demonstrates, expertise can be learned and amplified by incorporating the voices and endorsements of other renowned experts Tori, who writes mostly about Jewish food history and cuisine, was inspired by her grandparents’ love

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<sup>104</sup> Olga, “Homemade Farmer’s Cheese (Tvorog),” *Olga in the Kitchen*, February 24, 2021, <https://www.olgainthekitchen.com/homemade-farmers-cheese/>.

<sup>105</sup> Drozhzhin, “Russian Creamcheese Vatrushka Buns.”

<sup>106</sup> Natalya Drozhzhin, “Easy Farmer’s Cheese Recipe,” *Momdsish*, March 1, 2022, <https://momdsish.com/recipe/267/farmers-cheese>.

<sup>107</sup> Drozhzhin, “Easy Farmer’s Cheese Recipe.”

<sup>108</sup> Natasha Kravchuk, “Farmers Cheese Tvorog Recipe,” *Natasha’s Kitchen*, February 7, 2012, <https://natashaskitchen.com/farmers-cheese-recipe-домашний-сыр/>.

of history, gardening, travel, and art. Her interest in Jewish food came from her Israeli husband's Sephardic mother and Ashkenazi father. Tori converted to Judaism around the same time she began her first blog, *The Shiksa in the Kitchen* in 2010, a blog devoted primarily to Jewish cuisine.<sup>109</sup> In time, her love of history and food history, in particular, led to her second blog, *The History Kitchen*. Eventually, managing two blogs became unwieldy and she combined them into a single blog, *Tori Avey: Every Day Inspired by the Past*.<sup>110</sup> This single blog in turn has developed into simply *Tori Avey*.<sup>111</sup> She has been featured on numerous networks and talk-shows and endorsed by several food celebrities primarily for her food histories. She does not possess any special training other than what she learned at the side of her grandmother during her childhood, from her cookbook research, guidance from friends and family, and her own experimentation. She does not personally keep kosher in her home, but she is mindful of kosher guidelines when posting recipes. In addition to food blogging, she writes about travel, and is a screenwriter and producer. She takes most of her own photographs but works with a web designer for her site.<sup>112</sup>

Tori's very detailed guest post about koláče is very different from the other female ethnic bloggers we have studied because it is posted by one of her guest contributors, Gil Marks.<sup>113</sup> Marks, a prolific writer and food historian who wrote mostly on Jewish culinary topics, posted

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<sup>109</sup> I suspect that in this case, Tori is not using the extremely derogatory connotation of *shiksa* but is more likely using the hipster slang definition that she is a gentile woman who has managed to attract and marry a Jewish man, and this is her story of how she tries to keep him happy in with her culinary exploits. <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-shiksa-yiddish-word-2076332>  
<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=shiksa>

<sup>110</sup> Tori Avey, "About Tori Avey," *Tori Avey*, 2019, <https://toriavey.com/about>.

<sup>111</sup> Tori Avey, "About Tori Avey - Tori Avey," *Tori Avey*, 2022, <https://toriavey.com/about/>.

<sup>112</sup> Avey, "About Tori Avey," 2019.

<sup>113</sup> Tori Avey, "Toriavey.com Contributors," *Tori Avey*, 2024, <https://www.toriavey.com/contributors/>.

“Tori Avey’s Homemade Kolache Recipe – Authentic Czech Pastries at Home.”<sup>114</sup> He researched and wrote a detailed history of the koláče for this post. As a special treat, he provides his personal recipe for kolache along with recipes for poppy seed topping, prune topping, apricot topping, blueberry topping, cherry topping and *posipka* (drobenka) crumble. The recipe itself is pretty classic Czech American. The recipe was originally posted in 2013 and there are an overwhelming approximately 115 pages of comments in the discussion section with the most recent June 30, 2023. This illustrates the popularity of this post and that even though Tori did not write the provided history or recipe it resonates with a community searching for connection to the past and solutions to missing ingredients, recipes, or missing recipe writers.<sup>115</sup> Unlike other bloggers explored in this paper, Tori’s kolache recipe suggests that some women’s legitimacy and even fame as food curators rest on a learned and practiced expertise and on the knowledge of other experts, whose recipes and comments serve to validate their own authority.

Tori’s reliance on guest bakers and their recipes to bolster her expertise is unique though among a genre of food blogging dominated by women who instead refer to and celebrate their mothers’ and grandmothers’ baking skills and use them to project their positionality as domestic food curators, experts worth following because they draw on a multigenerational network of female culinary knowledge. Anna Pisulak of *Różowa Patera [Pink Panther]* embodies this, which is why I end this analysis with her postings on koláče. The epitome of the feminine domestic goddess, Anna is a wife and mother, a trained clinical and pediatric dietician, and her “*serce oddane kuchini* (heart is devoted to the kitchen).”<sup>116</sup> She is Polish, and her blog is in

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<sup>114</sup> Gil Marks, “Tori Avey’s Homemade Kolache Recipe - Authentic Czech Pastries at Home,” *Tori Avey*, August 20, 2013, 2013, <https://toriavey.com/kolache/>.

<sup>115</sup> Marks, “Tori Avey’s Homemade Kolache Recipe.”

<sup>116</sup> Anna Pisulak, “O mnie [About Me],” *Różowa Patera [Pink Panther]*, 2023, 2023, <http://rozowapatera.blogspot.com/p/o-mnie.html>.

Polish. The visually stunning images in her blog posts rely heavily on the rose-tinted side of the color spectrum in shades of red, pink and mauve. Her photos are simply breath-taking.<sup>117</sup> The intensity of her rosy blog design has softened a little since I first encountered it in 2019, but her ‘nom de plume’ is still an accurate appellation. Despite the skill and talent she displays on her blog posts, she still pays homage to her mother who is the real domestic goddess in her mind. As she says in her post “*Drożdżowa gwiazda z makiem* (Yeast Star with Poppy Seeds [Makowiec]),” in her house “makowiec to domena mojej mamy I jeszcze nigdy jak żyję, nie upiekłam ani jednego (poppy seed cake is [her] mom’s domain and [she’s] never baked a single one in [her] life).”<sup>118</sup> So respectfully is she of her own mother’s years of expertise and skill with this cherished kolach that she will not even make a Polish poppy seed roll/makowiec in the same traditional shape. She acknowledges that her readers may prefer the traditional shape and indicates that the ingredients and mixing instructions provided can easily be shaped in the more traditional style.<sup>119</sup> Even two years later she still bakes something different than the traditional blue-black poppyseed makowiec of her mother’s sacred purview. She says “jak już kiedyś wspominałam, klasyczny świąteczny makowiec to działka mojej mamy (as I mentioned before, the classic Christmas poppy seed cake is my mother’s specialty).”<sup>120</sup> This time her makowiec is

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I translated this using my limited knowledge of Polish and the help of Google Translate. Any translation mistakes are my own.

<sup>117</sup> Pisulak, “O mnie [About Me].”

<sup>118</sup> Anna Pisulak, “Drożdżowa Gwiazda z Makiem [Yeast Star with Poppy Seeds],” *Różowa Patera [Pink Panther]*, December 9, 2017, <http://rozowapatera.blogspot.com/2017/12/drozdzowa-gwiazda-z-makiem.html>.

I translated this using my limited knowledge of Polish and the help of Google Translate. Any translation mistakes are my own.

<sup>119</sup> Pisulak, “Drożdżowa Gwiazda z Makiem [Yeast Star with Poppy Seeds].”

<sup>120</sup> Anna Pisulak, “Strucla z Białym Makiem [Strudel with White Poppy Seeds],” December 6, 2019, <http://rozowapatera.blogspot.com/2019/12/strucla-z-biaym-makiem.html>.

I translated this using my limited knowledge of Polish and the help of Google Translate. Any translation mistakes are my own.

filled with ground white poppy seeds, marzipan, ground walnuts and it is rolled in from both side creating sort of a *palmier* shape when you slice it. All of her comments are from fellow Polish speakers and mostly just compliment how pretty her food looks. There is one exchange about the “*Gwiazda z Makiem* [Yeast Star with Poppy Seeds]” post that I have translated. On December 23, 2018, Mother After Hours writes, “delicious. We just baked it, the third time in our lives from your recipe!”<sup>121</sup> Anna responds with delight, “I am very happy! Best regards!”<sup>122</sup> So obviously, although she demurs to mother as the chief makowiec baker, she has skills and can craft an excellent recipe that is enjoyed by others. This is especially impressive because her blog, unlike most of the others considered in this paper, is aimed primarily at co-nationals or people who are close to the culinary and cultural origins of these recipes and who probably have their own lived/embodied baking knowledge. In other words, they are not as limited in their recipe options as perhaps someone who no longer speaks the language or has access to the commercial or semi-commercial products from bakeries with which to compare quality end results.

This paper has taken readers on a sometimes-dizzying journey through the world of koláče and its cousins while exploring expressions of domesticity, ethnicity, the world of ethnic cuisine, and food authenticity among female food bloggers and their readers. It also argues that female food bloggers can gain expert status and authority over food authenticity by curating

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<sup>121</sup> Pisulak, “Drożdżowa Gwiazda z Makiem [Yeast Star with Poppy Seeds].”

I translated this using my limited knowledge of Polish and the help of Google Translate. Any translation mistakes are my own.

<sup>122</sup> Pisulak, “Drożdżowa Gwiazda z Makiem [Yeast Star with Poppy Seeds].”

I translated this using my limited knowledge of Polish and the help of Google Translate. Any translation mistakes are my own.

good food, baking techniques, and ingredient resources. The paper has also examined ways that women may retake control over their bodies by shifting the focus on to the food they present in their blog posts. As this paper demonstrates, female bloggers can obtain expert guardian or gatekeeper status through their careful presentation of koláče within its traditional authentic ethnic setting, curating for their readers sources for finding or making difficult to find ingredients or equipment, and maintaining an aura of welcoming and warm domesticity and femininity.

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