TITLE :

Eating Like a Man: Meat Consumption as Gender Performance

Hierarchization of Masculinities and Reappropriation of Hegemonic Masculine Norms
through Dietary Practices

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Contents :

At a time when climate change is becoming a growing concern, and health and wildlife are under threat, meat consumption is being singled out by many climate and public health experts (Brown, 2024). Meat production is one of the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions, contributing significantly to environmental degradation (*New FAO Report Maps Pathways Towards Lower Livestock Emissions*, 2023). Despite this alarming reality, few people seem inclined to change their traditional meat-eating habits to adopt a vegetarian or vegan diet. Among those who do change their dietary practices, a notable disparity emerges. If we take the example of vegans, who consume no animal products whatsoever, men account for only around 24% of them, while women make up the vast majority at 76% (Gorvett, 2022). This observation raises a fundamental question: is meat consumption influenced by gender dynamics, and more specifically, by notions of masculinity?

The orientation of this dissertation is the fruit of a personal and academic journey, rooted in my life experience as a vegetarian man since the age of 16. I grew up in an environment where meat consumption is not only trivialized, but also valued as a symbol of virility and strength. This dominant food culture often led to divisive remarks and jokes about me, such as "you throw like a vegetarian", particularly when my sporting performance in handball was not up to scratch. These comments, made first by my friends' parents and later by my teammates, pointed to an alleged link between my physical strength and my diet. At family dinners, I often found myself on the bangs, considered an anomaly. My dietary choices were not taken into account, and I was confronted with reflections such as "you don't know what you're missing", "you want a bit [of meat]" or "it's funny, usually vegetarians are all skinny but you're pretty strong". These situations often forced me to justify myself, to explain my choice not to eat meat by invoking environmental reasons, rather than talking about my compassion for animals, for fear that emotion would not be a valid argument in the eyes of my interlocutors. This self-censorship prompted me to question the social and cultural norms that dictate eating habits and perceptions of masculinity. My involvement in the social sciences reinforced this reflection. In particular, I wrote a research paper on men's refusal to consume plant-based alternatives, and worked with the Terra! association, where I met many actors and researchers involved in sustainable and ethical agriculture. This thesis is therefore the culmination of a personal and academic trajectory, combining ethical intuition, militant commitment and scientific curiosity. It seeks to understand the extent to which male hegemonic norms can influence meat consumption and production, and to explore the social,

cultural and political implications of these practices. My personal journey has enabled me to take a critical and informed look at these issues, with the hope of contributing to a better understanding and transformation of food behaviors towards greater sustainability and ethics.

So it is worth looking at the place of food in our Western societies. Food plays a central role in the construction of individuals, particularly in their socialization, whether primary or secondary. Given the figures available, there seems to be one predominant eating pattern: the omnivorous diet, in which meat consumption is encouraged. Given its predominance, this leads us to believe that this diet may act as a social norm. Social norms are implicit or explicit rules governing behavior within a society or social group. They dictate what is considered acceptable or unacceptable, thus influencing the actions and attitudes of individuals (Durkheim, 1895). Norms also produce constraining effects by dictating specific behaviors and imposing sanctions, explicit or implicit, on those who deviate, thus reinforcing conformity and social cohesion while limiting the diversity of individual practices (Durkheim, 1895). Among these are gender norms, which are the societal expectations that determine what is considered "appropriate" for men and women in terms of behavior, appearance and social roles. These norms are inculcated from childhood and reinforced throughout life through various agents of socialization such as family, school, media and peers (Butler, 1990). The effect of these gender norms is to enjoin individuals to strive towards a predefined ideal, regarded as the model to follow. This is known as hegemony, and in our case, hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is a concept developed by R.W. Connell to describe the dominant configuration of masculinity that subordinates other forms of masculinity as well as femininity. Hegemonic masculinity is characterized by the valorization of strength, independence, autonomy, competitiveness and emotional suppression. It places wealthy, Western men who meet these criteria at the top of the male pyramid (Connell, 1995). Thus, masculine hegemonic norms designate a set of socially valued traits, behaviors and roles that define the ideal of dominant masculinity. To match these norms and meet social expectations, men would try to match, through actions or behaviors, each of the hegemonic masculine characteristics to get closer to this ideal. This phenomenon is known as gender performance, and consists of a series of repeated performative acts that produce the illusion of a stable gender identity (Butler, 1990). After a certain point, performance becomes mechanical: it is internalized.   Performance can be associated with the notion of ritualized behavior. Ritualization refers to the set of repetitive, symbolic actions that structure daily life and reinforce social norms (Goffman, 1967). The

result is the creation of a gendered habitus. This concept is derived from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus. The gendered habitus describes how social dispositions influence gendered practices. It refers to the enduring, internalized tendencies that guide choices according to gender norms (Wendy Ashall, 2004).

We thus hypothesize that hegemonic masculinity can have an impact on dietary behavior, conveying within it norms of consumption, particularly of meat, that correspond to and reinforce this model. To explore the links between meat and masculinity, we questioned the gender performance associated with meat consumption and the ritualization of associated practices, such as barbecuing, that support this hegemonic model. Furthermore, the gendered habitus allows us to interrogate food preferences, and to examine the extent to which these preferences can contribute to the creation of gendered norms in terms of eating behavior.

To investigate the links between gender and eating behavior, we have drawn on a variety of sources. On the one hand, social science articles from several disciplines (sociology, anthropology, history and Western economics) enabled us to grasp the context of the creation and perpetuation of gender norms, particularly those of hegemonic masculinity, to better identify their influence on meat consumption and production. On the other hand, we used reports from NGOs and public and private institutions such as the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), GreenPeace and IFOP to examine quantitative data, essential for analyzing meat consumption trends and associated socio-economic dynamics. To place our subject in a cultural context, we examined advertisements from major meat groups to analyze their communication strategies. The aim was to determine whether and how these ads mobilize a masculine imaginary to promote meat consumption, which would have a potential impact on gendered perceptions linked to meat. Finally, to enrich our approach, we conducted a comparative analysis between different influencers on social networks producing explicitly anti-vegan content.

The aim is to understand the gender norms that influence people's eating habits, and to question what encourages the emergence and adoption of certain eating behaviors. Analyzing the link between meat consumption and masculinity can help us understand resistance to dietary change, but also explore how gender norms shape individual behaviors. By focusing on the motivations and justifications of meat consumers, and men in particular, this work aims to shed light on the underlying reasons for the persistence of meat consumption despite the pressure of growing ecological and ethical imperatives. The aim of this research is to explore how male hegemonic norms influence meat consumption and production, and how questioning the meat diet can lead to the emergence of a new form of masculinity.

In the light of these first elements, we will see how the norms linked to a hegemonic model of masculinity can influence the consumption and production of meat, and to what extent can questioning the meat diet lead to the emergence of a new form of masculinity?

To address the question of the influence of male hegemonic norms on meat consumption and production, we begin by examining food socialization as a source of gendered norms. We will highlight the importance of the role of the home in food socialization, exploring how food behaviors are transmitted and reproduced within families, and reinforced by the cultural and political environment (Part I). Next, we look at how meat consumption maintains male hegemony, exploring the symbolic, industrial and performative dimensions of this phenomenon. We'll look at how meat-eating is used as a means of performing one's gender, symbolizing power and virility, and how this fits into a patriarchal capitalism that has shaped the meat industry and reproduces hierarchies in consumption and production among men (Part II). Finally, we'll examine how food choices can become a militant act and a form of resistance to traditional norms, or on the contrary a means of reaffirming them. This will lead us to question the evolution of hegemonic masculinity, and the creation of new masculinities. (Part III).

Part 1: How primary and secondary socialization create and influence gendered eating behaviors.

A. How do family, health and body ideals generate gendered eating behavior?

As mentioned in the introduction, food plays a social role in the relationship between individuals and their families, as well as with the society in which they live. Food is not an innate concept, but an education acquired first during primary socialization within the family home, then shaped and modified by secondary socialization. As a means of distinguishing oneself or, on the contrary, of creating a bond, food takes on a strong symbolic and identity-building character for individuals. At the same time, it is also the vehicle for certain norms that are transmitted and perpetuated. It is this role that we're particularly interested in when it comes to understanding the influence of gender norms on eating behavior, and in particular the choice of a meat diet.

The notion of "making family" through food is essential to understanding the early stages of food socialization, a process at the heart of identity formation and social norms in the individual. Émile Durkheim (1997, p. 7-8) emphasized the importance of the home in this context, describing it as the first place where children learn "ways of acting, thinking and feeling", and by extension how to eat. From the earliest years, the home imposes routines such as regular mealtimes and bedtimes, inculcating practices and habits that will be fundamental in the construction of the individual, and subsequently his or her way of life. Durkheim adds that primary socialization, and in our case dietary socialization, is not just a question of nutrition, but also reflects social and cultural expectations. Food thus plays a role in the integration of the individual within his or her family, but also within a social class, a society and, more broadly, a culture. This idea is reinforced by Maurice Halbwachs, who explored the concept of "lifestyle". He demonstrates that food choices express membership of a social group (Halbwachs, 1930, p. 502). He points out that food decisions in a household are the result of negotiations between its members, reflecting and reinforcing both a sense of family and class belonging (Halbwachs, 1913, p. 26, 30). We shall also see that the management of food within the household is not neutral in terms of the hierarchical roles of family members. Children not only learn how to feed themselves, they also experiment with their place within their family, and more broadly within society. The eating practices transmitted during primary socialization shape and condition the way an individual makes food choices. Food is therefore not just a biological need, but also the expression of a social identity (D. Cardon, 2019). From this point of view, a radical change of diet can place an

individual in a position of opposition to his or her family, but also to society if this change goes against the predominant diet. Food management is therefore not without consequences for an individual's integration into his or her community. It can consolidate, or on the contrary weaken, an individual's social identity and place in society.

Having examined how the home serves as the primary site of food socialization, where culinary practices and food rituals initiated in childhood establish social and cultural norms, it is crucial to explore the dynamics of these practices through the prism of the gendered division of labor. This invites us to consider not only how norms are transmitted and reinforced within the household, but also how they assign and maintain specific roles for men and women within that household. These roles, deeply rooted in culinary activities and eating responsibilities, illustrate quite explicitly the perpetuation of gender norms. Food thus becomes a vector of gendered socialization. By examining how tasks are allocated according to gender, we can see how the very structure of the household supports and reproduces gender norms, thus influencing how individuals conform or resist societal expectations in terms of food and care.

The gendered distribution of food-related tasks is a powerful vector for the reproduction of social norms. According to Kaufmann (2005), women are often perceived primarily as shoppers and cooks, roles that reinforce their traditional position within the household and contribute to the reproduction of gender norms. This over-representation of women in culinary tasks is not simply an isolated practice, but a manifestation of the power relations that define their domestic experience. The gendered division of domestic labor, well documented by Parsons (2015), shows that men and women have differentiated relationships to food: for women, it is often linked to health, while for men, it is primarily associated with pleasure.

This dichotomy is reinforced by studies such as those by Perrot (2009), which reveal that even when men participate in the shopping, they often do so without engaging in the mental management of this task, as the shopping list is generally prepared by the women. This distribution of responsibilities shows how the social environment influences and distinguishes patterns of marital organization of food activities that may influence children's behavior.

The work of Poulain (2009) and Fielding-Singh and Oleschuk (2023) adds another layer to this analysis, showing that women, seen as the guardians of family health and nutrition, take on a responsibility that goes beyond simply preparing meals. They must also ensure that the

family's diet conforms to the expectations of their social status, making the sharing of domestic tasks even more complex. This "emotional labor", as described by Hochschild (1983), goes far beyond simple domestic activities and goes to the heart of family and social dynamics.

Ultimately, these theoretical perspectives show that women are often caught in a tension between responding to the preferences of their loved ones and the broader normative injunctions of society, creating a figure of the cook who is constantly under pressure, navigating between fragmented personal identity and family responsibilities.

The gendered division of eating duties within the home has profound repercussions on the way dietary norms are passed on to children. Differences in the involvement of fathers and mothers in daily meals create a distinct socialization framework for girls and boys. Parents, as role models and first points of reference, influence children's future eating habits. This dynamic shows how the gendered transmission of eating roles in childhood prepares the ground for differentiated eating practices in adulthood, and opens the door to the transmission of gendered eating behaviors.

The transmission of dietary norms in the home reveals significant disparities in the socialization of girls and boys. Family meals, beyond their nutritional role, are essential moments for the social and dietary education of children, playing a role in the transmission of norms and values, such as good table manners, how to consume which food and listening to others (Khandpur et al., 2014). Fathers, in particular, adopt educational approaches that often differ from those of mothers. They are less inclined to limit food and encourage snack consumption more, while valuing fruit and vegetable consumption less (Hendy et al., 2009; Musher-Eizenman et al., 2012; Dupuy, 2017).These differences are part of a broader framework in which men tend to favor a hedonistic approach to eating, valuing the pleasure of eating and sensory awakening, particularly through valued activities (Dupuy, 2017).

Women, on the other hand, are often more informed and concerned about medical and social norms related to dietary health, feeling responsible for the nutritional well-being of the family, especially children (Bouazzouni, 2022). Indeed, there are gendered approaches to food-related prevention.

Women generally adopt restrictive, healthy eating habits in response to societal norms and health concerns (Wardle et al., 2004). These concerns are reinforced by the regular medical interactions women experience throughout their lives. Ritualized passages with

medicine, such as first menstruation, contraception, and diet during pregnancy, lead women to develop in-depth medical knowledge and increased trust in the medical profession (Courtenay, 2000). This frequent exposure to medical and nutritional advice makes them more permeable to discourses on nutrition and health. Women will therefore see diet as a medical and health issue in its own right, and will be more receptive than men to nutritional recommendations. Also, dietary and aesthetic demands are particularly strong for women, who undergo increased medical surveillance throughout their lives, notably due to monitoring linked to maternity, pre-menopause, menopause and associated weight gain (Dupuy, 2017). These requirements prompt women to adopt strict diets and favor foods perceived as beneficial to their long-term health.

What is more, the responsibility for feeding the family properly often falls to women. They are perceived as the guardians of family health, which drives them to ensure that the meals they prepare are nutritious and balanced (Dupuy, 2017). This social responsibility reinforces their commitment to healthy, preventive eating practices. Women's eating strategies are also influenced by social constructions of pleasure and moderation. Unlike men, women are pushed towards a moderate, even ascetic orientation. This moderation is perceived as necessary to maintain a body that conforms to ideals of health and beauty (Wardle et al., 2004).

These health-oriented dietary strategies can include regular consumption of fruit and vegetables, choosing nutrient-rich, low-calorie foods, and reducing consumption of foods perceived as unhealthy, such as saturated fats and refined sugars (Wardle et al., 2004). Women may also engage in specific diets, such as vegetarianism or veganism, which are often associated with health benefits and chronic disease prevention.

The medicalization of diet, by promoting food choices guided by health considerations, highlights significant gender differences. While women, influenced by frequent medical interactions and strong social pressure, often adopt restrictive, health-oriented diets, men develop distinct dietary strategies.

This divergence in approach to food is also influenced by social background. Parents from working-class backgrounds focus more on immediate needs, with a functional view of food centered on outward signs of growth and behavior, while those from middle-class backgrounds adopt a more scientific, future-projected approach (Coveney, 2005; Wills et al., 2011). These dietary orientations leave lasting traces, particularly among adolescents, who continue to reflect family eating habits in their choices (Diasio, 2014). Daily meals, according to Maurice (2014, 2015), thus become the scene of negotiations around nutritional and family

norms, where children act differently according to their social background, their relationship to the body and their peer group. These domestic dynamics reveal the complex social relations of gender, age and class that are crucial to the socialization of food.

Despite a trend towards greater equality in the sharing of culinary tasks, new inequalities are emerging, particularly in the involvement of men and women in the kitchen. Fathers' investment often tends to be perceived as supportive or troubleshooting, prioritizing pleasure and playfulness, while mothers remain primarily responsible for family health issues and the transmission of nutrition principles (Maurice, 2013). This highlights the persistent challenges associated with gender stereotypes in the management of domestic food, despite advances towards a more equitable distribution of responsibilities.

Disparities in food socialization between girls and boys highlight fundamental differences in the way food norms and values are transmitted within households. This differentiation continues and is amplified in secondary socialization, where external influences such as the media and social networks play a crucial role. Indeed, secondary socialization exposes individuals to specific body ideals, such as the hegemonic male body, which encourages diets to achieve and maintain a muscular, athletic appearance. Dietary norms then become not only a matter of health, but also of social conformity and gender identity, profoundly influencing men's and women's food choices throughout their lives.

> B. *The influence of public policy, the media and pop culture on the reproduction of gendered eating habits.*

Secondary socialization refers to the learning process that continues after primary socialization (the learning of fundamental norms and values in the family or close environment during childhood). Secondary socialization concerns the acquisition of norms, values, attitudes and behaviors specific to particular contexts within society, such as schools, workplaces or religious groups (Durkheim, 1922). It is through contact with our peers and the media that we form an idea of what a man's or woman's body looks like. The standards conveyed will enable us to distinguish between a socially desirable body, and to put in place strategies to achieve this bodily ideal. This ideal is constantly evolving with time and place. It is also influenced by medical considerations and the public policies associated with them.

Public policies play a crucial role in shaping how individuals perceive their bodies and establish links between health and food. These policies, often geared towards nutrition education for households and consumers, influence eating behavior by promoting specific recommendations that shape people's relationships with their bodies and food. Analyzing nutrition education policies and the tools used to this end is complex, largely due to the frequent changes in recommendations. A simplistic approach would be to say, for example, that vegetables are recommended because of increased recognition of their vitamin content. However, these changes in content represent only the visible part of a wider problem that goes to the very heart of nutrition education. Several researchers have chosen to examine not only the recommendations themselves, but also the way they are implemented and the lifestyle behaviors they encourage. These studies focus on the scientific and political construction of populations' dietary "need", while analyzing the quantification devices that influence the relationships between individuals and their environment (Simmons, 2015).

Jessica Mudry, in her analysis of consumer education tools, strongly criticizes the emphasis placed on quantification in these instruments. Food guides in the USA, for example, focus more on the quantification of nutrients than on the foods themselves (Mudry, 2009). In Australia, recommendations follow a similar model, where nutrition education focuses primarily on calories and vitamins rather than whole foods (Santich, 1995). Critics of this model point out that far from being a simple vector of information, this approach to nutritional quantification participates in the neoliberal transformation of the relationship to oneself, encouraging everyone to consider their bodies as capital to be managed in an economically rational way (Depecker, 2014). Contemporary nutrition education policies often fall within the framework of "nutritionism" (Scrinis, 2013). Nutritionism" is defined as an ideological focus on the nutritional components of foods, to the detriment of other characteristics such as taste or digestive effects. This approach reduces foods to their chemical elements, encouraging a vision of food based on quantification. This paradigm transforms the way individuals perceive and think about their food, encouraging them to meticulously monitor their intake of specific nutrients rather than adopting an overall, balanced diet. The use of quantification in discourses aimed at changing individual behavior can vary depending on how the public problem is politically constructed. In the USA, for example, the emphasis is on individual responsibility rather than on external social factors, in contrast to France, where the aim is to help consumers overcome what prevents them from eating well (Berlivet, 2004).

Public policies, through their prescriptions and recommendations, have a profound influence on the perception of health and food, by guiding dietary behavior through specific nutritional recommendations. These guidelines, although focused on scientific and economic aspects, help to shape people's relationship with their bodies and food.

The development of public food policies is directly linked to food-related health concerns. This is known as the medicalization of food. Food is perceived not only as a means of subsistence, but also as a strategy for medical prevention (Mayes, 2014). This approach transforms food choices into health interventions, influencing individual and collective eating behaviors. This perspective is rooted in the growing recognition of the role of diet in preventing disease and maintaining overall health.

The notion of the medicalization of food is based on the idea that food can be used to prevent various chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and certain cancers. According to Pollan (2008), this approach encourages individuals to select foods not only for their nutritional value, but also for their medicinal properties. For example, reducing meat consumption is often recommended to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

This medicalization of food leads to the adoption of new eating behaviors, where food choices are guided by health considerations rather than taste or cultural preferences, as Scrinis (2013, chapter 2) explains. He introduces the concept of "nutritionism", which describes this focus on individual nutrients and their effects on health, rather than on foods as a whole.

However, this medicalization of diet is not without its critics. Some researchers point out that this approach can lead to an unhealthy obsession with nutrition and anxiety about food. Orthorexia nervosa, for example, is an eating disorder characterized by an excessive fixation on healthy eating, often exacerbated by public health messages and nutritional trends (Bratman & Knight, 2000). What is more, this approach can marginalize cultural dietary traditions that don not fit Western medical paradigms.

The combined influence of public policy and the medicalization of diet will help to construct a desirable eating pattern based on recommendations drawn up by experts. However, this eating pattern is also influenced by the search for a physical ideal, constructed not only by these recommendations, but also by the media and cultural productions.

Although women are subject to a great deal of pressure when it comes to their physical appearance, diktats largely affect men too. Representations of an "ideal body" are nurtured

and fed by advertising and the media. These physical diktats, and all the strategies put in place to conform to them, have a direct impact on eating habits.

Gendered food marketing theorization has its roots in the 1950s thanks to Austrian psychologist and marketing expert Ernest Dichter. Dichter believed that convincing Americans that food possessed gender identity and sensuality would enable advertisers to adequately address consumers' needs to fulfill their gender roles (Sax, 2016). Prior to this period, advertisers focused primarily on material needs, viewing consumption as a logical and rational act, devoid of any emotional dimension. Applying Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theories to marketing, Dichter established the concept of "motivation" (Dichter, 1960), a set of unconscious factors influencing behavior. According to Dichter, the irrational governs our choices and behavior, contrary to the illusion that our decisions are guided by rationality. He argues that feelings represent a higher form of reason, and our culture has difficulty accepting that the purely irrational can be the key to our actions.

Repeated exposure to gender stereotypes via advertising, films, series and books eventually convinces individuals of their veracity and the need to conform to them. This conformity is essential to being perceived as an acceptable man or woman (Bruneel, 2014). Indeed, advertisements play a role in the reproduction of gendered eating behaviors by reinforcing stereotypes and social norms linked to the consumption of certain foods. Marketing exerts a profound influence on what consumers perceive as desirable, particularly in terms of body image, and consequently on the food products they choose to consume (Kilbourne, 2015). By associating certain foods with ideals of beauty, success or masculinity, marketing shapes individuals' inclinations and consumption patterns, encouraging them to align their food choices with their identity (Ye et al., 2019).

Ridgeway (2005) establishes the concept of the male hegemonic body. It refers to a body ideal that embodies socially valued characteristics such as strength, size, athleticism and muscular definition. This model of masculinity, widely disseminated by the media and social networks, exerts a considerable influence on men's eating habits. The importance attached to a muscular and athletic physical appearance leads men to adopt specific diets aimed at developing and striving towards or maintaining this ideal and desired body image.

Pierre Bourdieu (1979), in *La Distinction*, highlights how social class influences food choices. This concept can also be applied to the male body ideal. Men are often encouraged to consume high-protein, high-calorie foods to promote muscle growth and maintain a robust, virile appearance. For example, diets based on meat and dairy consumption are seen as essential to achieving the ideal of the hegemonic male body (Bourdieu, 1979).

The influence of the media and social networks also enables the reproduction of this ideal. Shilling (2012) describes how the media project a fit and healthy male body image, fuelling anxieties and preoccupations with appearance. This media pressure leads some men to constantly monitor their diet to match these high standards. The imperative of physical performance and the aesthetics of appearance thus become determining factors in food choices, reinforcing the idea that the consumption of certain types of food is intrinsically linked to masculinity. The logic is that of absorbing the properties and characteristics of a food by consuming it: eating muscle to build muscle.

This is the result of a very specific socio-psychological process. Indeed, the theory of objectification, developed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), although mainly applied to women, also extends to men. This theory explains that constant surveillance of body appearance can lead to specific eating behaviors to meet social expectations. Men, by internalizing body norms, evaluate and control their bodies through their diet, which can lead to food choices geared towards constructing and maintaining an idealized body image (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

The process of body objectification, as represented by David et al. (2018), begins with socialization experiences such as sexual objectification and gender role conflicts. These experiences lead to the internalization of cultural standards of appearance, which in turn fuels body surveillance and self-objectification. Constant body surveillance and self-objectification engender greater body shame and anxiety, driving individuals to seek muscularity or mass to meet social expectations (David et al., 2018). This process has significant consequences for men's food choices. The quest for defined muscularity prompts the consumption of protein-rich foods, often of animal origin, perceived as necessary to build and maintain muscle.

Media and popular culture exert an influence on our perceptions and eating habits, contributing to the formation and perpetuation of gender norms. Stereotypical representations of gender in the media and popular culture are not simply passive reflections of reality, but rather performances that contribute to the reproduction and normalization of social norms (Stewart & Cole, 2019). Gendered advertisements play a role in this process by conveying implicit messages about what it means to be masculine or feminine in terms of food consumption.

Gendered advertising reproduces food stereotypes by associating specific products with concepts of weight management, beauty or masculinity. In her book *Steaksisme,* journalist

Nora Bouazzini analyzes the communications strategy of the major industrial meat producer Charal. Over the past few years, some of their ads have shown women also enjoying the debauchery of meat, fat and salt. However, even these ads aimed at women convey the health stereotypes mentioned above: responsible for family health, a fetus is depicted dancing energetically in its mother's womb, another woman with her head on her belly stands up surprised by the fetus' energy and asks "but what are you feeding it?", then in the next shot we see her eating a steak (CHARAL, 2020). It is interesting to see here how meat is not shown as a pleasure food, but rather as a food that contributes to the good health of the fetus, for which the mother is responsible. However, commercials featuring women are still a rarity, and a good draft can still be seen. Other archaic ads persist, like the one from 2004, which showed a man dubbing a Cheetah in pursuit of an antelope, with a voice-over asking, "Who's the biggest predator of all? This and similar ads continue to perpetuate essentializing, sexist cultural representations that reinforce the myth of the violent man dominating nature and bodies. For example, the "hmmm Charal" campaign with its slogan "vivons forts" (Charal, 2019) strongly emphasizes the masculine aspect of meat consumption. This ad uses images of traditional masculinity, associating meat consumption with physical strength, virility, and a form of dietary sexuality in that the protagonist "enjoys gustatively" throughout the commercial. These ads therefore maintain and play with gender stereotypes in food preferences, perpetuating established social norms by primarily targeting the male population.

Finally, the media and popular culture play a role in the transmission and normalization of gendered eating behaviors, profoundly influencing our perceptions of bodies and eating habits. Images of bodies perceived in the media can become personal standards of attractiveness (Thompson & Stice, 2001). This influence is largely mediated by the internalization of media-promoted body ideals, which become personal ideals, increasing body dissatisfaction and shaping individuals' ideal selves (Vuong et al., 2021; Lavender et al., 2017).

The concept of parasocial bonding, introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956), explains how fictional relationships established with media figures or influencers can influence our behavior. These parasocial ties enable us to develop trust in these media figures, making us more receptive to their advice and behavior. For example, influencers on social networks, with whom young people often have strong parasocial ties, can influence their food choices and body ideals, often following dietary recommendations and health trends (Rounsefell et al., 2019).

Popular culture also reinforces gender norms through the representation of gendered eating behaviors. Media and popular culture shape public perceptions by often presenting exaggerated gender roles that influence eating habits (Stanley et al., 2023). For example, successful media representations in popular shonen anime, such as those of male characters engaging in massive meat-eating feasts, emphasize a masculine association with hearty, protein-rich meals. Characters such as Son Goku from Dragon Ball and Luffy from One Piece are often shown eating large quantities of food, reinforcing the idea that excessive meat consumption is a masculine characteristic (Bakayarou, 2020; Db, Dbz, and Dbz-Super Eating Moments/compilations, 2023; Mun, 2022).

Muscular superheroes present another dimension of this media influence. Young et al (2013) showed that exposure to muscular superheroes without a parasocial relationship can make men feel bad about their own bodies. However, if a parasocial bond exists, individuals may feel inspired and motivated, viewing these superheroes as bodily goals to achieve. This dynamic is key to understanding the impact of the media on eating behaviors and body perceptions, as it illustrates how individuals adopt the ideals promoted by the media figures they admire.

Influencers on social networks, particularly those specializing in lifestyle, play a significant role in this dynamic (Eglem, 2017). They rationalize the concept of lifestyle and use it to create content and communities around specific lifestyles, including dietary advice and body ideals (Rounsefell et al., 2019). This phenomenon is not limited to young people; older people are also influenced by other forms of media, such as magazines and television, which continue to shape their perceptions of health and the body.

These messages and stereotypes shared by the media, including advertisements, draw on a long-standing imaginary of meat that is firmly rooted in our societies. It therefore seems interesting to analyze the social significance of meat in order to understand the resulting stereotypes, imaginaries and norms, particularly in terms of masculinity.

Part 2: Maintaining a masculine hegemony of domination over gender, race, class and the living through symbolism, industry and gender performance.

Taking a closer look at the symbolic and performative significance of the meat diet allows us to analyze the dynamics at work behind the food choices made by individuals, particularly men. Indeed, tracing the history of the perception of meat in contemporary Western societies brings to light gender, race and class biases.

A. Meat as a performance of gender.

Meat, particularly red meat, has long been associated with strength, virility and power. The link between virility, strength and meat consumption persists to this day, and has observable consequences on food choices, and on the construction of food-related gender norms. This perception is reinforced by advertising campaigns and media representations that traditionally associate meat with masculine ideals of strength and power (Faunalytics, 2023).

Historically, hunting and meat-eating were considered activities reserved mainly for men, assigning them the role of providers and protectors of their families and communities. The collective imagination places meat consumption in a kind of historical continuity. Modern carnivorous men see themselves as the heirs of their hunting ancestors, the quintessence of virility. By consuming meat, these men symbolically affirm their connection with this idealized image of the hunter-gatherer, embodying brute force and domination (Fraïssé & Stewart, 2008).

This symbolic link is reinforced by what is known as the incorporation principle. This refers to the belief that when we ingest a food, we acquire its characteristics, whether positive or negative. In a sense, we feed not only on nutrients, but also on the imaginary. In 1994, sociologist Frisscher explained that "consuming a food is not just about consuming it, destroying it, it is about letting it penetrate you, letting it become part of you. In fact, food is a substance that we allow to penetrate to the very depths of our bodily intimacy, to mingle with us, to become us". Ingesting food, making it our own, could therefore in some way alter our essence, and have consequences for our social appearance. Added to this principle of incorporation is what is known as magical thinking, conceptualized in the 19th century by anthropologists Edward Taylor and George Frazer. It consists of two principles: the law of similarity and the law of contagion. The latter establishes the link between the principle of incorporation and magical thinking. By absorbing a food, we acquire its properties and

virtues. In concrete terms, "magical eating" translates into beliefs that carrots make you lovable, low-fat products make you slimmer, or that oysters are aphrodisiacs. It is also what leads some people to believe that vegetarians and vegans are weak and apathetic. Indeed, if we follow the logic that meat is a means of acquiring strength, and thus asserting one's virility, by abstaining from eating it, they would not be absorbing the animal's strength. What is more, vegetables and legumes, assimilated to prehistoric gathering reserved for women, and therefore considered feminine foods, would not be suitable for providing energy and contributing to the development or maintenance of muscle mass (Fraïssé & Stewart, 2008). So, eating meat can be seen both as maintaining a supposed link with the practices of our prehistoric ancestors, but also as a means of asserting one's strength, and masculine identity. Eating meat, and thus following in the footsteps of the hunter-gatherer, allows us to assert ourselves as men, to play our role as men.

This topos of the male hunter will justify a supposed biological role and induce a hierarchy in the tasks performed by men and women. It is one of the foundations of the gendered division of domestic labor. This is particularly true of heterosexual couples. Women are often confined to the private sphere and reduced to domestic and reproductive work, both of which are devalued, while men are assigned valued, productive work in the public sphere. The stereotype of the *breadwinner* and the housewife is deeply rooted in the collective imagination, and has concrete consequences for the analysis and understanding of researchers. Indeed, archaeologists and anthropologists have long asserted that, among our prehistoric ancestors, hunting was the exclusive preserve of men, and gathering of food of women. Marylène Patou-Mathis, prehistorian at the CNRS and author of *L'homme préhistorique est aussi une femme*, points out that we have made the mistake of applying a modern reading of gender relations to the past (Patou-Mathis, 2020). This projection has contributed to the myth of the strong, active male hunter, as opposed to the gentle, passive female gatherer.

On the other hand, recent research and anthropological observations indicate that the diet of hunter-gatherer (and hunter-gatherer-girl) societies from the Paleolithic to the present day is made up of around 70% plant foods, often gathered by women. This contradicts the idea of daily meat consumption (Patou-Mathis, 2020), and calls into question the symbolism attached to it. In addition, the transition to agriculture and animal husbandry, which began in the Neolithic period, accentuated the gendered division of labor and rendered societies profoundly unequal. In the 1980s, anthropologist Peggy Sanday studied the power structures

of a hundred or so hunter-gatherer societies and found that those most dependent on plants for food were more egalitarian than those relying on animals, which were more patriarchal (Sanday, 1981).

In addition to justifying a biological role and a gendered division of labor, meat is also a means of hierarchizing individuals within the family. Meat, perceived as nourishing par excellence, strong and giving strength and health, is seen as a dish reserved for men, who supposedly need it more to fulfill their role. Christine Delphy, feminist sociologist and pioneer of gender studies in France, observed in the meals of rural French families in the 70s that meat was rarely on everyone's menu. Often, it appears on the table only to be eaten by the head of the family, especially if it is butcher's meat. Cheaper meats were not so exclusively available, but women and children never had the choice morsel reserved for fathers (Delphy, 1970).

Although men often consume twice as much meat as women, in 1979 Pierre Bourdieu observed that it is women who buy and cook meat (Bourdieu, 1979). This unequal distribution of meat consumption is a form of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is defined as non-physical violence exercised through symbolic means such as language, images, beliefs and cultural practices (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1993). This violence, often subtle and invisible, contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities by legitimizing and naturalizing relations of domination. In this perspective, women who are in charge of the home, and in the front line of feeding their families, would not need to eat as much meat as men, because they would not need to prove their strength to the outside world - that is not their role, but that of the head of the family. In this context, meat becomes a manifestation of symbolic violence, reinforcing male privilege within the household and perpetuating gender inequalities.

Last but not least, this distribution is permanently influenced by cultural and religious practices. Meat plays a crucial role in the construction of cultural identity and the preservation of traditions. It is an integral part of many culinary practices and cultural rituals. For example, in some cultures, meat dishes are an essential part of religious festivals and family celebrations. Meat thus becomes a means of strengthening community and family ties. The preparation and consumption of meat thus become acts of cultural transmission and the perpetuation of traditions (Cardon et al. 2022), even though meat consumption has become almost daily in our Western societies. Consuming certain cuts of meat on specific occasions,

as previous generations did, remains a common practice, illustrating the cultural continuity between generations.

Religion also plays a significant role in influencing our diets, giving particular meaning to our habits, often in gendered ways. Fieldhouse cites De Garine, noting that food performs six general functions in religious practices: communication with God or other supernatural forces, demonstration of faith through symbolic acts and rituals, rejection of worldliness, reinforcement of feelings of identity or belonging, expression of separation, and reinforcement of ecological pragmatism (Monterrosa et al., 2020). These functions frequently define food prohibitions, food acceptability and food practices within religious groups.

What is more, religion, like philosophy, introduces relationships of domination, not only between genders, but also between the human species and animals.

The Bible, in Genesis chapter 9, reinforces this notion of hierarchy and human domination over animals: "God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, 'You will be a cause of fear and terror to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, to everything that moves on the earth, and to every fish of the sea. They are given into your hands" (The Bible, Genesis 9:2). Similarly, in the 4th century B.C., Aristotle asserted in *The Politics* the natural superiority of humans over animals: "We must believe that plants are made for animals and animals for men. Privatized, domesticated, they serve and feed him; wild, they contribute, if not at least for the most part, to his subsistence and his various needs, providing him with clothing and still other resources. If, then, nature does nothing incomplete, if it does nothing in vain, it must necessarily have created all this for man" (Aristotle, The Politics).

This traditional, religious and philosophical vision demonstrates a hierarchy between genders and species, which can also contribute to legitimizing and producing a very specific division of labor, thus legitimizing certain privileges and practices.

Another way of understanding the social and cultural construction and perpetuation of the hierarchical and violent relationship between humans and animals is to interpret it in terms of "ideology". This ideological dimension of meat consumption, often referred to as "carnism", a concept developed by Melanie Joy, trivializes meat consumption by considering it normal, natural and necessary. According to Joy, individuals acquire this way of thinking during their socialization, which leads them to feel empathy for certain categories of animals (notably pets), while being insensitive to the suffering of others (such as livestock), thus avoiding a "moral malaise" (Joy, 2010). Once again, we see the importance of primary

socialization when it comes to learning about food, and by extension the moral considerations linked to our consumption patterns.

Christian Stache and Christin Bernhold offer a different perspective on the ideological basis of meat production. Referring to the work of Antonio Gramsci, they argue that the ideologies legitimizing meat consumption must be understood as an integral part of a class-capitalist society. In such a society, a "hegemony of meat" prevails, stabilizing the domination of the ruling class, and in particular meat capital, over subordinate classes and animals (Stache & Bernhold, 2021).

Meat hegemony can be understood as a set of beliefs, values and social practices that promote meat production and consumption as natural, normal and necessary. This hegemony is maintained and reinforced by the institutions, media, and economic and political practices that shape capitalist society. Meat capital represents the financial investments, production infrastructures, technologies and supply chains mobilized to meet the growing demand for meat in the industrial agrifood system (Nungesser & Winter, 2021).

This meat ideology is closely linked to male hegemonic norms. The values associated with meat consumption, such as strength, virility and dominance, reflect and reinforce the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Meat consumption thus becomes a means for men to affirm and perpetuate their social status and dominant gender identity. As Joy (2010) notes, this socialization process begins at an early age, inculcating values that not only normalize meat consumption but also link the practice to masculine identity.

Furthermore, the hegemony of meat contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities by legitimizing and naturalizing relations of domination between the sexes. Meat, as a symbol of power and status, is often associated with male privilege, in both the domestic and public spheres. This dynamic is reinforced by media representations and cultural practices which, as mentioned above, present meat consumption as an intrinsically masculine act, thus contributing to the perpetuation of masculine hegemonic norms (Nungesser & Winter, 2021).

Thus, meat ideology and the hegemony of meat play a crucial role in the stabilization and reproduction of masculine hegemonic norms within contemporary capitalist society. These ideologies not only justify and naturalize meat consumption, they also reinforce existing power structures and social hierarchies, thus contributing to the perpetuation of gender and class inequalities.

B. Patriarchal meat capitalism: how the industry has shaped and reproduced a hierarchy of meat consumption and production among men.

Meat consumption and its distinctive power are closely linked to the birth and development of capitalist and industrialized society. According to Nungesser and Winter (2021), meat consumption increased "surprisingly in parallel with industrialization". Before the rise of capitalism, meat consumption was mainly reserved for the secular upper class, who consumed "extraordinarily high" quantities, as Norbert Elias explains (Nungesser & Winter, 2021). By contrast, the clergy, especially in monasteries, abstained from eating meat, regarding it as a form of gluttony. The medieval lower classes, meanwhile, suffered from frequent food shortages. Meat was therefore a distinctive food before the development of capitalism, but its role changed fundamentally with the advent of industrialization (Nungesser & Winter, 2021).

During the 19th century, the science of nutrition gained in importance as a social institution for the transmission of knowledge about food (Nungesser & Winter, 2021). Two aspects are particularly important in this respect. Firstly, the concept of meat has changed significantly. With the evolution of nutritional knowledge towards a biochemical model, meat was no longer seen as difficult to digest, but as a healthy, nourishing food. Because of its protein content, meat was now seen as necessary for muscle growth, which led to a masculine connotation of meat, as physical strength was seen above all as a necessity for working men (Nungesser & Winter, 2021). Secondly, nutritional science was mobilized from a "biopolitical" point of view (Foucault, 2004) to appease social conflicts. Nutritional knowledge was used to calculate food rations in order to scientifically justify the provision of food to workers (Nungesser & Winter, 2021). For example, nutritionist Carl Voit (1831-1908) advised workers to consume large quantities of protein, reserving meat for men in his guidelines (Nungesser & Winter, 2021). The general increase in meat consumption is therefore linked to the establishment of a capitalist class society, and the allocation of hard manual labor to men. In industrialized societies, meat is transformed into a mass commodity, and its masculine connotation is culturally perpetuated and persists (Nungesser & Winter, 2021). This transformation of meat into a mass commodity not only satisfied growing demand, but also consolidated male hegemonic norms by associating meat consumption with strength, virility and high social status. In short, the development of the meat industry has played a crucial role in the reproduction of male hegemonic norms. Meat, as a symbol of

power and status, has reinforced gender and class hierarchies, contributing to the perpetuation of social inequalities in contemporary capitalist society.

Bourdieu's well-known observations on different food tastes and practices can only be understood in the context of the increased availability and affordability of meat. In his study of French society in the 1960s, Bourdieu (1974, pp. 175-193) compares the consumption patterns of different classes and class fractions. On the basis of this comparison, he juxtaposes the "taste of necessity" and the "taste of luxury". Whereas the "taste of necessity" is characteristic of the dominated classes, who prefer "heavy, greasy, fattening foods" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 177), the "taste of luxury", typical of the dominant classes, focuses not only on the form and mode of consumption, but also on individual foods. As Bourdieu and other sociologists have shown, this differentiation of taste applies above all to meat, which is closely linked to both class and gender. Drawing on Bourdieu's work, Petra Frerichs and Margareta Steinrücke (Nungesser & Winter, 2021) assert, in a comparative study conducted through interviews between different social classes, that meat, as a "male power food", is a "mark of separation" between proletarian and other consumers. According to this Bourdieusian vision, members of the lower classes prefer coarse, fatty meats such as pork, while members of the upper classes prefer "leaner, lighter (more digestible), non-fatty" meats (1979, p. 177) such as veal, lamb, mutton and above all fish, which Bourdieu (1979, p. 190) interprets as entirely "non-proletarian". Thus, following the example of historical studies, Bourdieu emphasizes the link between meat, masculinity and work: "Meat, a nourishing food par excellence, strong and fortifying, giving vigor, blood and health, is the dish of men, who serve themselves, while women content themselves with a small portion" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 192). But above all, in the middle and upper strata of society, Bourdieu identifies important class differences. Class fractions in which economic capital dominates tend to live life to the full, while fractions richer in cultural capital cultivate an "ascetic" element in their lifestyle, which often includes a "controlled diet" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 213). Bourdieu touches on another crucial dimension of meat consumption, which he does not fully develop. He briefly mentions vegetarianism as an element of the "counter-culture" and interprets it as a "desperate effort to defy the gravity of the social field" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 370). This interpretation highlights how food choices can be used as a means of social distinction and contestation of dominant norms. The evolution of meat consumption practices and their distinctive power are therefore closely linked to the emergence of capitalist and industrialized society. Meat consumption, in particular, has been used to establish and reinforce social hierarchies based on class and gender. This distinction between meat eaters, but also between

them and vegetarians, reflects and perpetuates masculine hegemonic norms, where meat is valued as a symbol of power and virility, thus contributing to the reproduction of social inequalities. (Nungesser & Winter, 2021).

The concentration and intensification of meat production is often interpreted as the quasi-automatic result of logistical and technological developments, such as the implementation of refrigeration or mechanization, or economic principles such as economies of scale. However, historical and sociological perspectives also point to social and political reasons, such as the weakening of trade unions or low standards of worker protection (Nungesser & Winter, 2021).

Indeed, the boom in contemporary meat production is also the result of a weakening of social protections for small-scale producers, who are unable to compete with the big boys. Katrin Hirte contributes to a more global understanding of the transformation of meat production. Her analysis focuses on concentration processes in the German slaughter industry. Hirte demonstrates that these processes are mainly interpreted in the context of agricultural economics as the necessary result of economies of scale. Referring to the example of the "Böckenhoff Plan", which served as a kind of blueprint for the concentration of the slaughter industry in the new German states after 1989, Hirte shows how problematic such a narrow economic explanation is. On the one hand, because it ignores the political decision-making processes behind the transformation of the slaughter industry; on the other, because it conceals the decisive role that the discipline of agricultural economics itself played in shaping the German meat industry (Nungesser & Winter, 2021).

This inability of agricultural economics to reflect its own market-centric perspective continues to hamper a proper understanding of the various problematic consequences of meat production. For example, public subsidies, such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in Europe, play a crucial role in financially supporting this industry, enabling these large corporations to maintain and prosper despite the many social and environmental challenges associated with intensive meat production (Nungesser & Winter, 2021). The economic rationale favors the production of meat from intensive livestock farming, mainly benefiting large landowners. Indeed, the latter receive more funds from the CAP, since the latter remunerates according to the surface area of hectares and, in some cases, according to the quantity produced. The economic and political system therefore favors one way of producing meat, and rewards a certain category of producers: the large owners of intensive livestock farms. This economic model engenders large-scale meat production that not only often

ignores environmental and social costs, but also exacerbates economic inequalities by enriching large-scale farmers at the expense of small-scale producers and industry workers (France Télévisions, n.d.; Banque des territoires, 2019). What is more, this dynamic of concentration and intensification in meat production reinforces male hegemonic norms and creates a hierarchy of men in the production system. The large landowners, mostly men, are at the top of this hierarchy, benefiting from subsidies and economic advantages (Jarry, 2023), while the workers, often also middle- or lower-class men, find themselves at the bottom of this hierarchy, suffering difficult and precarious working conditions. This structure of power and domination conforms to male hegemonic norms that value strength, control and economic success.

Meat lobbies play a central role in reproducing norms of hegemonic masculinity through their influence on public policy. Their power extends far beyond traditional lobbying efforts, to include a variety of influencing practices that directly affect various segments of society, including children, consumers, and policymakers (Greenpeace France, 2022). A striking example is the way these lobbies present themselves in social networks and schools, directly influencing younger generations. They use subtle strategies to promote national meat consumption, highlighting French meat as an ecological and responsible choice. For example, advertisements such as that of the livestock and meat interprofession (Interbev) convey subtle messages linking meat consumption to environmentally responsible behavior. In a recent ad, the voice-over says "Thomas cares about the environment. Thomas gets around by bike. As Thomas is a flexitarian, he also loves meat. He understands that being a flexitarian means eating better thanks to responsible, sustainable quality meat." (Naturally Flexitarian, 2020). This type of marketing transforms semantics and turns controversy on its head, turning meat consumption into a patriotic and ecological act. What is more, meat lobbies have a pervasive presence in schools, organizing field trips and creating educational kits to promote a positive image of beef farming. These camouflaged "infomercials", sold for example in cultural department stores, are a means of creating a favorable mental image of the meat industry from an early age, masking the often difficult realities of livestock farmers (Greenpeace France, 2022). Lobbies also use bashing strategies to discredit personalities who seek to regulate meat production or consumption. A notable example is that of Richard Ramos, Modem deputy, who, during the parliamentary mission he chaired in 2020 on nitrate additives in charcuterie, was the victim of attempts to discredit him by the Fédération des Industries Charcutières (FICT). These attempts included sending videos to portray him in a bad light

(Greenpeace France, 2022). The attacks are not limited to men, but also affect women, often in sexist and violent ways. EELV MP Sandrine Rousseau, for example, has been the victim of harassment for her feminist and environmental positions, particularly on meat. The insulting messages she has received include threats of sexual violence and degrading mail, reflecting a direct attack not only on her political positions, but also on her gender such as "retourne faire la soupe salope" (TF1 INFO, 2024). This omnipresence and aggressiveness of the meat lobbies illustrates how, through the messages they convey, they contribute to maintaining and reinforcing masculine hegemonic norms and their link to life. By promoting meat consumption as normal, natural and necessary, and attacking those who question this practice, these lobbies actively participate in perpetuating gender and class hierarchies by promoting production standards that are far removed from reality. Meat, as a symbol of power and virility, thus becomes a tool of domination not only economically, but also culturally and socially, consolidating existing power structures. As a result, small-scale male farmers can be seen as part of a subordinate masculinity.

The meat industry is also the fruit of a colonial history which, even today, produces and reproduces a hierarchy between Western hegemonic masculinity and that of racialized men. According to S. Freidberg (2004), agriculture and food are deeply marked by the cultural and political histories of colonized countries. The way production is organized today reflects French and British colonial practices. In Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), the French tried to impose the model of the small family farm with no capital contribution, while in Zambia, the British sought to industrialize the country, by imposing wage labor in the reserves or mines. Today, in the post-colonial era, agriculture in these two countries remains strongly influenced by Western nations. Faced with food crises such as "mad cow", European countries have adopted stricter regulations on food production and trade, making the work of African farmers considerably more difficult. However, the latter are developing strategies to circumvent or subvert this globalized order, even if these may seem marginal. For example, some farmers, paid late by their sponsor, use the fertilizers supplied by the latter for their own gardens. Thus, globalized food chains are not only geographical and economic arrangements, but are also inscribed in the political and cultural history of nations, whether they are consumers or producers (Freidberg, 2004). The exploitation of peripheral labor is a persistent phenomenon in the meat industry, reflecting the historical dynamics of colonial exploitation. Practices such as the employment of irregular workers and slavery in agriculture are mirrored in the dynamics of meat production. Foreign labor is often exploited, working in precarious

and dangerous conditions for very low wages (Tabrizi, 2019; Amnesty International Svizzera, 2013). This exploitation is not only economic, but also reinforces racial and gender hierarchies, where white men occupy positions of power and control, while racialized workers remain marginalized and subordinate.

This explains why, in certain contexts, poaching becomes an act of resistance. The act of breaking the law may reflect the radicalization of certain marginalized groups. Viewing wildlife crime as a response to neoliberal colonialism can help explain this radicalization process. Poaching practices can be seen as a form of subversion against a system that perpetuates the exploitation and oppression of peripheral peoples (Freidberg, 2004). Male hegemonic norms are reproduced and reinforced through these dynamics of power and production. Western men in positions of power in the meat industry embody ideals of strength, control and domination, while racialized workers are confined to subordinate roles, perpetuating a hierarchy of masculinities. This hierarchy is not only economic, but also social and cultural, reproducing the inequalities and injustices inherited from colonial history.

Colonial neoliberalism transforms meat production into an activity dominated by market principles, where natural resources and labor are seen as marketable goods (Peterson et al., 2016). This results in the concentration of land and resources in the hands of large-scale farmers capable of maximizing economic returns. Small farmers, often engaged in extensive or traditional farming practices, are marginalized. The neoliberal system criminalizes their practices when they do not correspond to intensive, capitalist production norms, designating them as "deviants" (Peterson et al., 2016). This is reminiscent of how colonial neoliberalism excludes local populations from natural resources by forcing them to become eco-rational subjects (Peterson et al., 2016). So the practice of poaching, while damaging to the environment, can be seen as an action of resistance against the neocolonial meat production system by trying to break out of globalized market norms perceived as colonial (Peterson et al., 2016).

Meat is a power issue more than any other food. It is used as a way of performing a hegemonic masculinity and exercising privilege over nature in order to prove one's belonging to the dominant. In her seminal work *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol J. Adams argues that the hierarchy of meat proteins reinforces the hierarchy of race, class and gender. To illustrate the racial politics of meat, she evokes the white supremacists of the 19th century who promoted meat as a superior food. The physician Georges Beard, for example, believed that grains and vegetables were suitable for non-white men and women, asserting that "savages who have such an inferior diet are, from the intellectual point of view, far below beef-eaters

of any race". In his view, this explained the domination of the British over the rest of the world: "Thus, the rice-eating Indians and Chinese are under the domination of the English, who eat properly, that is, 'roast beef'" (Bouazzani, 2021, p. 61). In 1940, an advertisement commissioned by meat producers proclaimed: "We know that the races that consume meat have led and are still leading the progress achieved by mankind in its upward struggle through the ages" (Bouazzani, 2021, p. 61). Similarly, the stereotype of the "effeminate rice-eater" was a widely circulated trope in the 19th century, used to justify the supposed superiority of European colonizers over colonized populations (Stănescu, 2018). The consumption of meat and dairy products was presented as a way for colonizers to assert their masculinity and dominance. This trope was used to legitimize colonization based on a pseudo-scientific explanation of the alleged shortcomings of a non-European diet (Stănescu, 2018). For example, J. Leonard Corning, a physician, theorized in 1884 that the lack of intellectual vigor in colonized populations was due not to their race, but to their diet. According to him, a dietary change could resolve their supposed moral and intellectual inferiority (Stănescu, 2018). This stereotype was used to distinguish the white working class from "rice eaters", particularly in a context of immigration and perceived threats to the white working class. The latter defended their right to eat meat as a privilege of white citizenship, even though it went against the nutritional recommendations of the time. Meat thus became a symbol of racial superiority and virility, reinforcing male hegemonic norms (Nungesser & Winter, 2021). E. Melanie Du Puis points out that this correlation between colonialism, natalism and the falling cost of meat is no coincidence (Stănescu, 2018). She explains that "plenty of meat and the right kind of meat became a symbolic substitute for questions of class, gender and racial privilege, as they affected displaced Western male workers. As a result, market forces helped to allay working-class fears not by improving real wages or working conditions, but by supplying them with ever-increasing quantities of increasingly cheap meat" (Stănescu, 2018). This process enabled white workers to maintain a certain social status and sense of superiority despite the difficult economic conditions. Meat became a tool of social distinction, allowing the white working class to set themselves apart from immigrants and colonized populations. This reflects how the dynamics of meat consumption are interwoven with structures of power and domination, consolidating racial and gender hierarchies.

For Carol J. Adams, this racist and sexist propaganda of the all-powerful protein serves to maintain meat's status as a food for Western men, and thus confiscated from other groups. From a gender perspective, the observed differential consumption of meat - with men eating

more than women - can also be explained by the latter's voluntary or imposed deprivation (Adams, 1990). To understand how ethnicity becomes a category of social differentiation and inequality with meat, Larissa Deppisch (2019) describes how pork became a symbol of racist anti-Muslim propaganda in Europe. Conservative politicians and the far right claim the right to eat pork in public canteens, even though it has never been contested. This dynamic shows how meat becomes a tool of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is a form of non-physical violence exercised through symbolic means such as language, images, beliefs and cultural practices. It legitimizes and naturalizes relationships of domination. In the context of meat, this violence is exercised by valorizing meat consumption as an act of power and virility, associated with Western man, while marginalizing other social groups.

Part 3: When eating becomes a militant act. Towards a hybridization of masculinity?

Food choices are the result not only of education, but also of the society in which individuals evolve, namely a capitalist society with industrialized production. In this context, the way we eat carries symbolic weight. By eating according to the dominant diet - omnivorous and meat-based - we implicitly adhere to the norms it induces. Some will even explicitly assert this adherence and make their diet a standard of their opinion. Conversely, breaking away from it can mean, or be perceived as, questioning or criticizing the dominant consumption model, and the symbolic weight of meat, particularly in the construction of masculinity.

A.   When eating meat becomes an act of militancy and male differentiation.

We've discussed the importance of meat consumption from a cultural and religious point of view, but also what it implies in terms of affirming masculinity. To further explore the link between meat consumption and gender, we feel it would be interesting to examine it in terms of gender performance and self-perception.
Stanley et al (2023) support the idea that it is not simply being male that leads to greater meat consumption, but rather the level of self-assessed masculinity. Men who perceive themselves as more masculine are more resistant to the idea of reducing their meat consumption. Moreover, the study suggests that self-perceived gender has a triple effect. Men who see themselves as very masculine would be less inclined to reduce their meat consumption, to consider vegetarianism as a viable diet. They would also adhere more to the idea that eating meat is normal, natural, pleasurable and necessary. This suggests that the way in which individuals perceive and perform their gender may be a key to understanding the gendered nature of meat consumption, and the low prevalence of vegetarianism. Indeed, if meat is seen as a means of asserting one's virility or strength, reducing one's consumption would symbolically, even socially, undermine one's masculinity. As a result, those who identify more strongly with traditional gender identities may also have more conservative ideals, which explains the association between gender performance and meat-related attitudes. Men who wish to perform a traditional masculinity and conform to a majority masculine ideal type, would have no interest in adopting an alternative diet that could harm their image.

Meat consumption can be seen as a sine qua non for being a man and proving it. Men will affirm or reaffirm their masculinity by increasing their meat consumption, particularly when they feel their masculinity is threatened. They will consume beef more frequently, and choose red meat options over vegetarian alternatives (Mesler et al., 2022). What iss more, meat preparation is seen as a rather masculine activity. To come back to the place of meat within the family, cutting up meat pieces is rather attributed to men. Barbecuing - a predominantly male task - is also a time for asserting one's virility and socializing among men. The masculine management of the barbecue is seen by some feminists as symptomatic of men's need to reconnect with their "bestial nature", borrowing from the codes of the caveman figure. Barbecuing thus becomes a gender performance, where men reaffirm their masculinity through the preparation and consumption of meat. Moreover, plant-based alternatives are perceived as an infringement of the freedom to eat what one desires, and will reinforce opposition to the vegetarian diet (Rosenfeld, 2023). Finally, the virile character of meat is maintained through statements such as "real men eat meat" (Bouazzouni, 2021).

This vision of meat as a central element of masculine identity leads us to explore the profile of "meat lovers". These are consumers who eat meat regularly, without worrying about frequency. In view of the various elements we have just examined, we wondered about the correlation between a relationship with meat and a specific worldview associated with it. We will therefore examine whether this relationship with meat may be indicative of certain political opinions or a gendered vision of society. To do this, we will draw on a study by IFOP (2022), the French Institute of Public Opinion. This survey examines the links between various factors such as social position, meat consumption and the social vision of the respondents, who are all men. While meat is not necessarily a determining factor in respondents' social conservatism, the survey does highlight certain dynamics. For example, over-consumption of red meat or game, particularly when associated with certain socio-cultural characteristics such as working-class backgrounds, rurality and low levels of education, goes hand in hand with a very conservative attitude towards women, the world and the planet. It is important to note that the assertion that an immoderate love of meat is intrinsically linked to unbridled sexism is a simplistic shortcut. Indeed, surveys show that many meat-loving men are not necessarily sexist. However, in certain working-class, rural or identity circles, displaying a taste for this food symbolizing strength and power can be a way of performing one's gender, and asserting oneself in one's peer group. This attitude can also be interpreted as a response to a need to highlight a virility that may be undermined by

relative social failures (precariousness, unemployment, etc.), a low social position, or changes within society. Thus, meat consumption, particularly in these circles, can be perceived as a performance of masculinity. It is used to reaffirm the hegemony of a certain type of man, the carnivorous, strong, virile man, who corresponds to traditional norms of masculinity. This behavior is often linked to a conservative worldview, where the consumption of red meat becomes a symbol of resistance to societal and cultural change.

In view of this, the question arises as to the position of these male meat consumers in the face of changing gender norms, and the respective conditions of men and women. While meat consumption in general has little influence on the degree of sexism among men, the consumption of certain types of meat may be indicative of certain opinions. The consumption of beef and game, and the practice of hunting, generally indicate a low level of concern for animal welfare. There is also a correlation between these practices and sexist attitudes. Other practices, such as barbecuing, can also reinforce sexist stereotypes. Indeed, the mastery of cooking on embers, a field perceived as highly complex, is based on a sexist vision of this utensil, shared by almost one French person in two (46% sharing the idea that men do it better than women). The practice of barbecuing, symbolizing mastery and power, is rooted in gender stereotypes that perpetuate the idea that certain tasks, particularly those involving meat and cooking over an open fire, are intrinsically masculine. There is thus an established relationship between meat consumption and certain gendered behaviours.

For example, heavy consumers of beef - those who eat it every day - are far more imbued with sexist stereotypes than moderate consumers. This is reflected, for example, in a much more traditionalist conception of the family, with a rate of support for the idea that "A man's job is to earn money, a woman's job is to look after the house and the family" four times higher among daily consumers (41%) than among those who eat beef less than once a week (12%). Similarly, the rape culture[1] , measured by the indicator "When you want to have sex with them, many women say 'no', but that means 'yes'", is three times stronger among heavy users (36%) than among moderate users (12%). In the light of these results, intense consumption of red meat can be interpreted as a desire on the part of men to "look the part", seeing the ingestion of "masculine food" as a means of socially fulfilling their gendered role. Yet this belief goes hand in hand with a deeply misogynistic system of thought in its apprehension of gender relations. If we take the example of the hunters questioned in the

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[1] A sociological concept that emerged in the United States during the second wave of feminism to describe all the attitudes and behaviors shared within a society that minimize, normalize or even encourage rape and, more broadly, violent aggression and behavior towards women.

IFOP survey, they stand out for their greater tolerance of sexist and sexual harassment. This can be seen in their support for statements such as "When you want to have sex with them, many women say 'no', but that means 'yes'" (39%, versus 12% of non-hunters) or "To seduce her, a man must be free to bother a woman he likes" (47%, versus 15% of non-hunters).

Finally, analysis of the profile of "hyper-sexist" men (4% of men surveyed), i.e. those who adhere to all the sexist stereotypes tested by Ifop, confirms the idea that a hyper-meat diet often goes hand in hand with a conservative vision of the place of women, but also of men, in society. A high proportion of "hyper-sexist" men are found among hunters (20%), big game eaters (20%) and beef eaters (15%). It should be noted, however, that the survey reveals some nuances: many men are meat-lovers and hostile to sexism.

Without making the relationship with meat a determining characteristic of social conservatism, it highlights the dynamics of a fairly explicit entanglement between food choices, gendered norms and adherence to a traditional vision of gender relations. The (over)consumption of red meat or game, especially when associated with certain socio-cultural characteristics (working-class, rural, low level of education...), goes hand in hand with a very conservative relationship with women, the world and the planet. This taste for meat may be more prevalent in certain working-class, rural and identity-based environments.

If meat consumption can be a means of asserting one's dominant position over women, it can also be a tool for hierarchizing men among themselves, between those who eat it and the "others". Perhaps one of the most telling examples of this hierarchy is the term "soy boy", a mocking nickname used by "macho". It refers to men considered to have lost their virile power by consuming vegetable proteins. In France, far-right sympathizers are adept at this term and adhere to the ideology it conveys. Some 45% of Reconquête supporters and 35% of Rassemblement National supporters, France's two main conservative far-right parties, believe in the term. However, the term is now overwhelmingly disapproved of by French men (72%). This disapproval reflects an awareness that the use of this term is intended to denigrate foods with feminine connotations and, consequently, men who dare to transgress the dietary norms assigned to their gender. The majority of men do not subscribe to the idea that soy consumers are apathetic or in the process of "feminization" because they regularly absorb the life force of an animal. This perception is mainly held by a minority identity group, who are more likely to see meat consumption as a means of maintaining traditional standards of virility. So, despite the existence of certain currents of thought that seek to

devirilize men consuming plant proteins, most men reject these stereotypes. The French male population as a whole shows an openness to the deconstruction of dietary norms assigned to the male gender, although pockets of resistance persist among the most conservative groups.

However, the deconstruction of dietary norms assigned to the male gender in France is far from complete. Just over half of French men (55%) believe that "eating red meat gives a man strength and energy". This shows that many men still regard red meat as one of the only foods capable of providing the energy needed to build muscle mass. This perception can be put into perspective by the analysis of journalist Nora Bouazzouni, who sees in it the trace of an imaginary imbued with "magical thinking" based on the idea that absorbing the vital energy of the animal confers "strength, and therefore power and performance". The idea that red meat provides the energy needed to "conquer women and nature" is therefore not marginal among men. They are also sensitive to the thesis that gaining weight "devirilizes". For example, 46% of men believe that "women are more attracted to muscular men than thin men", reinforcing the association between red meat consumption and virility.

What is more, debates about the harmful effects of meat products have not yet made meat a food that is difficult to accept socially. Indeed, the label of meat-lover is now claimed by a majority of French people (56%), despite its familiar and potentially pejorative nature. However, the men who most proudly claim this status - notably the 18% who describe themselves as "very meat-lovers" - have a very right-wing political profile. They are over-represented among respondents on the extreme right of the political spectrum: 33%, three times more than those on the "left" (12%). For men influenced by identity-based discourses that value meat as a symbol of strength and power, asserting their taste for meat can be interpreted as a form of rejection of "dietary political correctness". In their eyes, it calls into question both the tradition of their territory, and the "virility" of men attached to a very meaty culinary heritage. There seems to be an ideological continuity between political preferences and individual lifestyles.

To explore this link, we took a look at carnivorous influencers and the content they disseminate on social networks.

Many health and lifestyle influencers are promoting the benefits of carnivorous diets, akin to paleo diets. This diet consists of consuming only raw, unprocessed products, avoiding grains derived from modern agriculture, and favoring raw produce and meat. According to the followers of this diet, it would be necessary to return to the eating habits of our prehistoric ancestors, as their diet would better correspond to the physiological needs of the human

species. They criticize modernity for having "colonized" our diet with processed products and junk food. The primal diet is based on three principles: good, healthy and natural. Popularized by Mark Sisson, former Ironman athlete turned fitness blogger, this diet has inspired many influencers in the fields of health, wellness and sport. Some of these influencers produce quite radical content. One example is Liver King, who has 5.9 million subscribers on TikTok and 1.1 million on YouTube. He publishes numerous videos in which he consumes animal tongues and raw testicles (LiverKing, 2024). Although this content is primarily intended for entertainment, it contributes to the creation of an ultra-meaty imaginary. While the WHO (2015) recommends limiting red meat consumption, these influencers go against the grain of medical recommendations, showing their defiance of science and institutions, and advocating an autonomous diet without the advice of health specialists. This positioning underlines the autonomy and defiance towards medical figures of these influencers, which, as previously mentioned, are two characteristics of hegemonic masculinity.

The idea of a Paleolithic meat diet is largely a fantasy. Indeed, knowledge of this era is limited, and it is a very long period with varied customs and diets depending on the region (Christina Warinner, 2013). There was no single diet, but a multitude of different ones. The vision of these influencers is therefore completely anachronistic, scientifically unfounded, and modeled on contemporary codes (Patou-Mathis, 2020). Their discourse is based on a fantasy of an idealized past where human beings would be healthier thanks to their diet. In contrast, veganism, perceived as a modern trend, appears as a defiance of a supposedly natural order of things. To better understand this anti-vegan trend, we analyzed the content of influencers with over 10,000 followers on social networks. It should also be noted that this anti-vegan content is increasingly popular, as shown by the amount of content available and the very large audience of some of these influencers. The aim is to examine whether there is a link between hegemonic masculinity and anti-vegan and anti-vegetarian discourse, which is generating a lot of reaction from these content creators. As a reminder, the vegan lifestyle consists in no longer consuming or buying products derived from animal exploitation, such as meat, leather, honey or wool.

Many carnivorous influencers are said to have experimented with veganism. They claim to have tried the vegan diet for some time and, faced with a deterioration in their health, decided to abandon it and adopt a carnivorous diet (Shannen Micheala, 2022; Pas Vegan, 2023). These testimonials, whether true or not, aim to demonstrate that the vegan diet is unhealthy, and to convey the idea that the carnivorous diet is preferable. These influencers do not simply

change their diet, they choose to broadcast their experience on social networks. The content they produce is not limited to promoting meat consumption, it is primarily an active critique of veganism. For carnivores, veganism is seen as "propaganda" to be actively fought against (Shannen Micheala, 2022). The idea that governments are complicit with vegans is a common one, with some even believing in a "vegan conspiracy" (cvcwellness, 2023). According to this theory, governments would recommend the vegan diet for lucrative reasons, or even to deliberately weaken the population (Paul Saladino MD, 2023). This movement also takes the codes of veganism and turns them on their head. For example, the creation of a "carnivore month" contrasts with January's "Veganuary" (Woods, 2024). By claiming these types of initiatives, carnivores seek to reverse the dominant-dominated position. They present themselves as marginalized people who defend a dietary commitment contrary to public opinion, which is said to be dominated by a vegan consensus. As such, this community produces a militant discourse that opposes veganism, using health arguments and conspiracy theories to justify their position. Their content, widely disseminated on social networks, aims to convince their subscribers of the benefits of a carnivorous diet while denigrating veganism. To understand why carnivores strive to discredit vegans, it is essential to grasp the values and imaginations they defend. The first of these values is virility. A large proportion of carnivorous content strongly valorizes muscles, physical strength and testosterone (cvcwellness, 2023). As mentioned above, meat consumption is highly gendered. Thus, eating meat is perceived as a way of becoming stronger and more virile, especially when it comes to consuming testicles (Liver King, 2023). Conversely, men who do not eat meat are seen as less virile, or even less of a man, as they are said to consume "estrogens" contained in soy, making them less masculine (cvcwellness, 2023; Liver King, 2024). In carnivorous content, the theme of domination of the food chain is recurrent. For example, Liver King consumes all kinds of meat and all animal parts, illustrating a position of total domination in the food chain. However, this is not a simple display of sadism; he is not gratuitously mean to the beasts. On the contrary, he plays on the position of the "good hunter": empathetic towards defenseless beings, but ruthless with his prey. The aim is also to create a distinction, even a hierarchy, between different ways of eating meat. This "carnivore ideology" intersects with several other themes, notably anti-modernism and "slow-life" in the countryside. They share discourses calling for an end to city life and the consumption of industrial products. Carnivores defend more "ethical" meat consumption, i.e. local and "good quality" meats, as opposed to vegans who are perceived as consumers of processed products (Liver King,

2024). Ecology is also seen as a city phenomenon, authoritarian and imposed (Paul Saladino MD, 2023), again demonstrating distrust of science.

In addition to criticizing veganism, carnivores often attack feminism, further revealing the link between gender and food (Get Real Girlfriend, 2022; cvcwellness, 2024). The carnivore movement covers a variety of conservative positions: climatoskeptics, antifeminists and ultra-virilists. They see in vegans everything they disapprove of: self-righteous environmentalists, city dwellers... in addition to people they accuse of being at the root of society's decadence. This promotes a very binary vision of society. Either you do not eat meat and you're not masculine enough, or you eat it and you have to ultra-perform your virility by eating meat that has been hunted, killed and often eaten raw, thus reviving the myth of the hunter. This performance can be interpreted as an attempt to distinguish oneself from those who eat badly, who no longer know the "real" taste of things, and those who do know, show it and act like discriminated minority whistle-blowers.

This movement brings together ultra-virilist men and antifeminist women, who together propose a social and gendered hierarchization of society based on diet and lifestyle.

B. *Vegetarians between marginalization and hybridization of masculinity.*

Insofar as they stand apart from a dominant model of masculinity, and the dietary norms associated with their gender, vegetarians and vegans can be seen as constituting an alternative, marginalized masculinity. Because of their distinct position from the dominant model of masculinity, but also from the consumption patterns widely disseminated in society, vegetarian men can be considered to be relegated to the margins of their social group.

Vegan men are often seen as "other", marked by emasculation and exclusion from the male social group. Negative perceptions of them often include a questioning of their masculinity. For example, when compared to omnivores, male vegetarians are often perceived as less masculine, which would reduce their attractiveness to women (Velzeboer et al., 2024). They are often perceived as less virile because of the strong association between meat consumption and masculinity. This stereotype reinforces the idea that to be perceived as virile, a man must consume meat, relegating vegan men to a marginalized position, vis à vis omnivorous men. Vegan men frequently report that their masculinity and physical prowess are questioned (Velzeboer et al., 2024). They are often considered weak because they do not eat meat.

In addition, they express experiences of disapproval from other men, and struggle to maintain their relationships with family and friends, or with their peers. For example, vegan athletes

are sometimes rejected by their teammates in team sports, and carnivorous men avoid association with them (Velzeboer et al., 2024; Fidolini, 2022, chapter 3). This negative perception, and the resulting marginalization, also illustrates how gender norms influence both food choices and food perceptions. Fidollini's account (2022, p.63) underlines these tensions between food choices and constructions of masculinity, highlighting how difficult it is for vegan men to navigate a society where meat consumption is strongly linked to masculine identity.

"If I'm with a group of boys, it's not like I'm telling them 'you know, I eat vegetable soup every night'. I don't even have a reason, but I'm usually with other boys. I feel even less need to tell them. Because I mean, vegetables are a woman's dish, my friends are a bunch of men, a bunch of testosterone. I don't tell them I'm eating soup.

From this point of view, vegetarian men can be seen as proposing a different conception of masculinity, by distinguishing themselves from a dominant model. Indeed, they often present a marked divergence from the ideals of dominant hegemonic masculinity. Studies show that men who adopt a vegetarian or vegan diet tend to reject the norms of hegemonic masculinity. For example, these men do not generally feel the need to reassert their strength and virility after becoming vegetarians. On the contrary, they often express their sensitivity and compassion, traits that are traditionally perceived as feminine within traditional gender norms (Emma Hautval, 2022). The adoption of a vegetarian or vegan diet can also be linked to a broader set of post-materialist values, which include a concern for animal rights, social justice and environmental sustainability. These values contrast sharply with the more traditional materialistic values associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as dominance and control over others and nature (Emma Hautval, 2022).

People who adopt a vegetarian diet present a distinct profile in terms of values, motivations, and social behaviors. In particular, the change of diet is motivated by concerns for health, environmental protection and animal welfare. These motivations tend to be more effective when they are intrinsic, i.e. based on deep personal values, rather than external pressures (Anderson, 2024). In terms of values, vegetarians are often associated with ideals of compassion, ethics and environmental sustainability. They may also strongly value autonomy and social justice. These values often influence their voting behavior, leading them to support parties and policies in favor of animal rights, environmental protection, and public health (Anderson, 2024). In view of this, it is interesting to examine the link between gender and

vegetarianism. Women are more likely than men to become vegetarians. This difference may be linked to what we mentioned initially concerning the weight of social constructs and primary socialization that associate meat consumption with masculinity, while more compassionate food choices are perceived as more aligned with female gender roles (Anderson, 2024).

From this point of view, vegetarians would find themselves marginalized from the dominant model of masculinity, as their dietary behavior brings them hierarchically closer to attitudes considered feminine. In general, vegetarians could challenge these traditional hierarchies, favoring alternative, more egalitarian and empathetic models of masculinity (Anderson, 2024). Like carnivores, vegetarians and vegans often use their dietary choices as a form of activism aimed at disrupting and changing social relationships. This form of activism, often referred to as "everyday activism" or "ecological citizenship", involves adopting alternative food practices that promote more ethical and environmental choices, thereby challenging dominant societal norms.

However, for many, these food choices go beyond personal preferences and are part of a social and political protest movement. By opting for a diet free of animal products, vegetarians and vegans challenge industrial food production systems that are often associated with animal cruelty, environmental degradation and public health problems (Vestergren & Uysal, 2022; Everts, 2020). Indeed, research shows that meat consumption has a much higher environmental cost than that of fruit and vegetables. As a result, many vegetarians and vegans cite environmental reasons for their food choices, regarding them as a form of climate activism. This type of activism departs from traditional forms of activism by focusing on everyday, individual changes, rather than mass demonstrations or direct collective action (Everts, 2020). Moreover, the vegan movement is often perceived as a social movement that challenges existing power structures. Vegan activists seek to transform not only consumption practices, but also power relations within society. By choosing not to consume animal products, they oppose the meat and dairy industries, which are powerful players in the global economy, and which, as mentioned above, echo a patriarchal culture. This opposition is often seen as an attempt to reduce the influence of these industries and promote more sustainable and ethical food systems (John Andrews, 2021). Finally, the stigma and challenges faced by vegans can reinforce their commitment. Studies show that vegans are often perceived as marginal or fanatical, which can paradoxically strengthen their determination to defend their food choices as a form of identity and social resistance (Vestergren & Uysal, 2022). In this sense, the act of no longer eating animal products becomes, in the same way as carnist

influencers, a political statement. It becomes a means of challenging norms and promoting alternative values of compassion, social justice and environmental sustainability.

However, vegetarians and vegans are not totally reinventing masculinity, but rather reappropriating some of its codes. A study of vegan men's narratives reveals that they are constructing a new kind of hegemonic masculine model. Instead of following traditional stereotypes, such as valuing abundant meals and disregarding danger, they emphasize skills such as the ability to take care of one's health, monitor one's well-being on a daily basis, be aware of one's vulnerabilities and maintain total control over one's body. Nevertheless, it' is not without a certain valuing of autonomy and independence, two strong notions in the definition of masculinity. They also demonstrate their ability to manage the deprivation of basic physiological needs, thus reaffirming hegemonic attributes of strength and resistance (Fidolini, 2022). Veganism is sometimes presented as an act of rebellion, where men do not "follow the crowd" and show courage in defending their beliefs despite stigma. What is more, many male vegans reappropriate virilist discourses. For example, they boast about maintaining or gaining muscle and strength, but also about beneficial hormonal changes such as higher testosterone levels or curative effects for erectile dysfunction (Fidolinni, 2022). In this way, they put vegetarianism at the service of a masculine ideal that follows very traditional codes.

The importance of role models is also highlighted, notably through the impact of well-known vegan athletes, who are perceived as determined, disciplined and rational. For example, male vegans place strong emphasis on rationality, a supposedly masculine trait, describing their choice to become vegans as entirely rational motivated by experts and scientific evidence, and not emotional, emotion being associated with the feminine. They emphasize their role as animal protectors, reformulating meat consumption as a sign of weakness rather than strength, and construct veganism as a sign of willpower, discipline, toughness and determination. Vegan men often feel the need to justify their decision in the context of masculinity, due to the stigma they experience. Some talk of hypermasculine activities such as fighting, shooting and asserting their sexual prowess.

Looking at the way plant-based alternatives are presented is also quite revealing of the reuse of masculine codes. Meat substitutes are consumed more by men when they are marketed in a way that preserves their image of virility (Vestergren & Uysal, 2022). By presenting them as a means of reinforcing masculinity, they are more accepted. The imaginary associated with meat, notably the idea that it sustains virility, remains a powerful symbol of masculinity.

Understanding how meat is used to reaffirm masculinity enables us to promote plant-based alternatives more effectively. One example is the TV ad for Impossible meat, a brand of "vegetarian meat", which takes up masculine codes (THALIHITA, 2024). It shows a muscular man overturning everything with force and energy, and ends with the protagonist riding out of a barn on a motorcycle, crashing through the door. It is all about freedom, not restriction, and all the characteristics of a strong, powerful man.

This reappropriation of codes of masculinity shows that vegan men are not necessarily seeking to reinvent masculinity. This approach represents a form of hybridization of hegemonic masculinity, which adapts and redefines itself. By confronting the risk of feminization associated with the meanings attributed to their eating practices, these men develop justification strategies aimed at rehabilitating their choices. In this way, they manage to integrate new values while retaining traits traditionally associated with masculinity. By appropriating new characteristics and associating them with traditional ones, hegemonic masculinity reinvents itself to respond to social and cultural change and maintain its dominant position (Demetriou, 2001). This hybrid approach allows us to navigate between societal expectations of virility and ethical dietary choices, illustrating an evolution of gender norms without a complete break with conventional masculine values.

In some circles, the acceptance of a diet considered more "effeminate" is facilitated by moral values that value open-mindedness and a reduced emphasis on rigid gender identities. As a result, veganism can be seen as a new way of performing one's gender, demonstrating openness and heightened moral awareness. It is important to note that this reappropriation of codes of masculinity is often associated with a certain social elite. Men who have access to health information, who can economically afford to invest in more expensive alternatives, and who have the time to train and open up to new cuisines, generally belong to the bourgeoisie. This is also reflected in the ability to create new industries or stores. Indeed, ethnic food stores that offer vegetarian meat substitutes can play a role in urban gentrification and exclude a fringe of the population. These stores attract customers with high cultural and economic capital, demonstrating how the consumption of meat and meat alternatives, interacts with a broad spectrum of socio-demographic differentiations and inequalities (Stock & Schmiz, 2019). Furthermore, the proportion of self-declared vegetarians climbs as one moves up the social ladder (Ouédraogo, 2020).

In view of this, we might consider the adoption of a vegetarian diet to be a strategy adopted by a certain category of men - educated and with the social and economic capital to do so - to

differentiate themselves not only from the masses, from the suburbs, but also from the bourgeoisie who do not adopt these moral values. Sociologist Sylvie Tissot's concept of *gayfriendlyness* could be used to analyze this phenomenon. Indeed, she demonstrates that tolerance towards LGBT+ people is a value promoted by an affluent, progressive bourgeois class (Pagiusco, 2020). It would therefore be a luxury, the concern of a wealthy upper class that can afford to educate itself to find alternatives and buy less mass-consumed, and therefore more expensive, products.

Finally, we can also note that some men, particularly bourgeois and therefore in a dominant social position, reject masculine norms, and care little about their physical appearance or strength. Fidolini (2022, p.98) again gives us a telling example of a well-to-do vegetarian man making speeches along these lines:

"I am not a wild boar like the men who eat everything and make noise while eating... My lifestyle is tied to the intentions and importance I place on aesthetics and being pleasing to others, both physically and in manners... For me, aesthetics and elegance are fundamental. I was married to a woman 15 years younger than me, and now I have a partner of 25 years old. I mean, how many people can boast and afford to have such a young partner? I have nothing to prove about my sexual function, etc. When we meet with high school friends, they always ask me how I manage because they are all with 48-year-old women. To me, 48-year-olds are old! I don't need to prove that I am a man, a wolf, an alpha male by eating meat... I show that I am a man by presenting my girlfriend to others... You should see their faces when I arrive at dinners. They all ask me, 'How do you do it?'"

These stories show that vegan men are not reinventing masculinity, but rather reappropriating its codes in the light of new dietary practices.

Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was to explore the weight of masculine hegemonic norms in the choice of diet. To do so, we sought to understand how masculine hegemonic norms influence meat consumption and production, and to what extent questioning the meat diet can lead to the emergence of a new form of masculinity. The aim was therefore to understand how the performativity of gender could be translated into a meat or vegetarian diet, and whether the choice of one or the other highlighted specific gender dynamics linked to one or other of the diets.

We began by examining the way in which food socialization and gendered norms are inculcated from an early age through the family nucleus, but also through the cultural environment in which we evolve. We felt it pertinent to back up these findings with an analysis of the role of public policy, advertising and the media in reproducing gendered eating habits. The meat industry, shaped by patriarchal capitalism, is also a factor in the maintenance and reproduction of a consumption hierarchy among men, but also between men and women. In parallel, we have studied the importance of meat consumption as a performance of gender, as a means of asserting a certain identity.

The results of our research show that meat consumption is deeply rooted in the traditional - Western - model of masculinity. Men who follow a carnivorous diet are often perceived as more virile, while those who adopt a vegetarian or vegan diet are marginalized and perceived as less masculine. It is interesting to note that the tensions surrounding food choices are in part a reflection of those that run through our societies around issues such as feminism and ecology. These new dietary practices have given rise to a new form of masculinity, carried by vegetarian men, who reappropriate certain codes of traditional masculinity, such as physical strength and self-determination, to redefine their masculine identity. This hybridization shows that vegan men are not necessarily seeking to reinvent masculinity, but rather to adapt it to include ethical food choices.

In conclusion, while traditional gender norms continue to shape the dominant model of masculinity linked to meat consumption, and despite pockets of resistance that can be very virulent, it seems that a shift in mentalities is underway among the population, including men. Vegan men, through their dietary choices, are challenging these norms and paving the way for a more inclusive and ethical masculinity. This dynamic reveals the tensions between societal

expectations and individual practices, highlighting the complexity of redefining masculinity through diet. We also find it interesting to note that the tensions - and passions - raised by men's dietary choices are not without echoes of other changes in society. The redefinitions and dynamics that run through male dietary behavior reflect the tensions in our Western societies and the major issues we face: feminism, the fight for greater gender equality, new family models, but also evolving perspectives challenge traditional notions of masculinity and dietary practices, prompting a reevaluation of how food choices intersect with identity, culture, and societal norms.

In the future, it would be pertinent to explore in greater depth the mechanisms of resistance and acceptance of these new forms of masculinity in different cultural and social contexts. A transdisciplinary study involving sociology, anthropology and gender studies could provide valuable keys to understanding how masculine identities are evolving in the face of contemporary ethical and environmental challenges. Taking up Sylvie Tissot's work on *Gayfriendlyness*, we might ask whether all vegetarians are tolerated. Applying her theory to vegetarianism, we would assume that vegetarians could be tolerated, even promoted, by the bourgeois and progressive sphere, as long as they do not challenge the economic and social order. This would be tantamount to promoting a neutral, depoliticized vegetarianism, and confining it to the private sphere. Vegetarians make an honorable choice, as long as they do not interfere with other people's diets. Militant vegetarians promoting their choices would therefore be de facto excluded and marginalized. This would create a distinction between vegetarians who conform to dominant norms, be they gender or social, and those who oppose them.

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