IN DEFENCE OF ENGLISH COOKING

GIJS BOLTEN

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THE SUCCESS OF TV DINNERS

Gijs Bolten 0160490
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First reader   Paolo de Medeiros
Second reader   Simon Cook

Corporate power manipulates world trade and government policies, its ethos influences management at all levels so that food production, retailing technology and marketing tools are all developed in specialised ways to influence the consumer to eat in a particular way, to continue in a lifestyle which profits the producer. The result in our food supply is a diet which is unhealthy, banal, tasteless and devoid of national characteristics.

—Spencer, *British Food* (338)
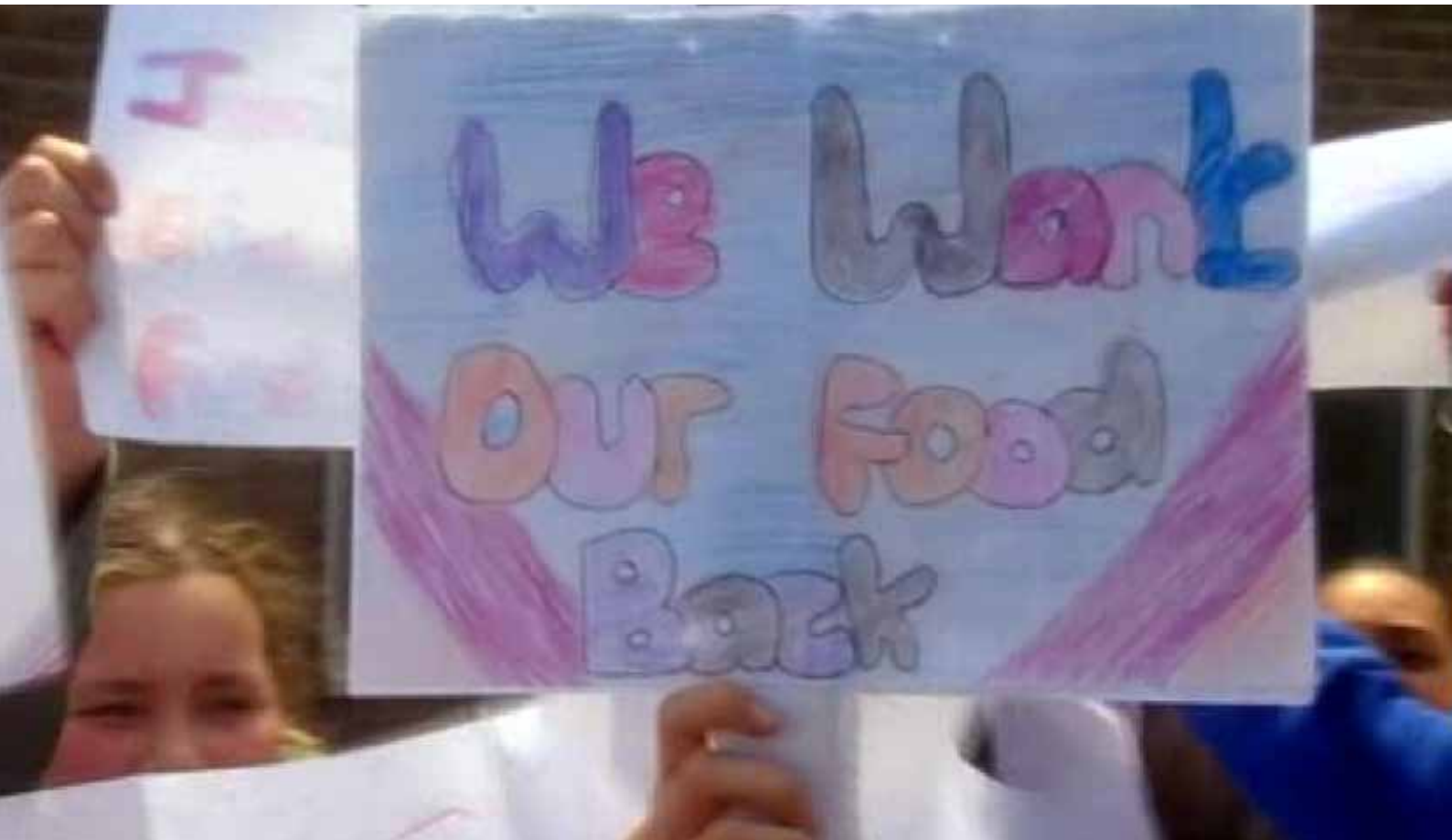
Fig. 1. Photograph by Jason Lowe.

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Fig. 2. Children protesting against Jamie's new school dinners.
From *Jamie's School Dinners*, episode 2.

Introduction

A lot has changed since George Orwell published his essay "In Defence of English Cooking" in 1945. Just after the War, and years before rationing would come to an end, he argued that it was time for the English to change their attitudes and take pride in English food. Ingredients and cooking methods from all over the world have since been introduced to the English diet; and the essay—basically a list of English produce—seems oddly protective now.

Since the 1990s the cookery genre has come to dominate the prime time evening slot on the BBC; and anecdotes about national shortages of produce mentioned in the show—called the Delia effect, after a nationwide shortage of cranberries after Delia Smith had used them—illustrate its success (Smith). Supermarkets, therefore, are happy to associate themselves with the genre and take an active interest in its content. There are more structural effects as well, such as the quick rise of the gastro-pub and farmer's markets with an eye for quality and regional produce. Furthermore, celebrity chef Jamie Oliver has started an awareness campaign on healthy eating and has put his efforts in making England's school meals healthier. All this suggests that the English are now taking interest in their food, and that cookery shows are having a real influence.

On the other hand, the idea that food in England is only recently recovering from years of decline has been put forward for the last century at least (Humble, 277). Meanwhile, the English are still responsible for the consumption of half the number of ready meals sold in Europe ("Ready Meals"; "UK Meals"); more than half of the English are heavier than recommended and the number of obese people in England has tripled in the last twenty years to more than twenty per cent (http://www.patient.co.uk/showdoc/23068957/). The success of the cookery genre, therefore, is ambiguous; yet, while food and food habits have been studied to some extent from different perspectives, the success of the cookery genre has hardly been investigated.

Food touches at the heart of people's individual and collective identities. Recipes, therefore, express a strong sense of community

and cookbooks have been instrumental in the development of national cooking styles (Mennell, 1985: 18). Stephen Mennell—who wrote one of the few serious books on the development of English cooking—thinks, however, that there is a natural trend towards a global culture where there will be increasing variety, yet diminishing contrasts in the way we eat. Bourdieu, on the other hand, suggests that taste is often used as a matter of social distinction and that there are major differences even within national cultures. More importantly, in search of cultural standing, each class tries to impose its ideas on others, in which "a central role is played by the institutions of culture [such as the BBC], of education and of intellectuals more generally" (Urry, 1990: 88). Hence, the cookery genre cannot be simply understood as instruction.

Indeed, recipes can introduce foreign ingredients and dishes in a non-threatening way; and many products have made their way to English shelves for everyday use. Interest in foreign food, however, has focused on easily transportable aspects, which has caused exotic dishes and ingredients to be reduced to objects of consumption for the English (Humble, 250). Moreover, recipes offer a fantasy of foreign adventures which can be enjoyed without actually carrying out their instructions; and many recipe readers are more interested in collecting recipes than preparing them (qtd. in Floyd 130). In fact, it could be argued that the cookery genre does not offer instruction at all, but a fantasy about cooking which is not possible to live up to. To understand the real influence of the cookery genre on TV, therefore, it must be understood that most of its meaning is formed intertextually with other DIY programmes with an interest in lifestyle and self-improvement. The explicit meaning of the cookery genre—to give instruction—has become relatively unimportant compared to its implicit message, which is that taste matters, and that it is a threat to self-esteem and national culture not to care about food and to try new things.

The history of the cookery genre goes back to long before Orwell's article. The first cookery programme on the BBC appeared as early as

1937, and was amongst the first real programmes ever to be broadcast on TV. England's reputation for bad food had already been established by then and was seen as one of the symptoms of the rising cultural influence of the masses. English cooking, therefore, fitted nicely with BBC's remit to "inform, entertain, educate"; and the genre has stayed an important part of BBC's programming ever since. As an English chef would have lacked credibility, however, it was no coincidence that the first TV chef, Boulestin, was a Frenchman (albeit a self-declared Anglophile). The success of French haute-cuisine in the restaurant trade had led to the idea that all good cooking was French cooking. Moreover, the upper middle classes and intellectuals took the French as an example because of France's general cultural hegemony in Europe at the time, while changing cultural relations within England had made food a suitable subject of conversation. The difference between English and French cooking habits, therefore, became a suitable vehicle to talk about taste in a broader sense; and French cooking was put forward on TV to express a general concern over the taste of the masses.

The intellectual context within which the developments after the War were to take place had thus been set. Even George Orwell had to admit that it was generally believed "the best English cooking, is simply French cooking" and that "English cooking is the worst in the world" (54). It is little wonder that foreign food has become increasingly available in England since. A restructuring of the retailing industry in Britain, as well as the development of new technologies such as microwave ovens and refrigerators, contributed to new possibilities for the English kitchen (Wrigley, 117). By opposing foreign food to English food, however, these developments have led to an increased effort to define Englishness, rather than to an embrace of a global identity.

The few articles that seriously look at the effect of the cookery genre focus on the influence of Elizabeth David, who is seen as the one who introduced the flavours of foreign countries to British palates just after the War. Especially her books on Mediterranean food

have been immensely influential; they should, however, not just be understood as an embrace of the Mediterranean as Elizabeth David used the recipe as a literary form to make a point—through the contrast that the perceived authenticity of Mediterranean peasant life provided—about English culture in general.

Despite the fact that Elizabeth David had focused on aesthetics, this perceived lack of authenticity in England was easily transplanted to other realms when a series of food scares in the 1980s and 90s gave rise to the idea that modern farming techniques are unnatural and unhealthy—while, at the same time, research started to suggest nutritional benefits of the Italian diet. Jamie Oliver, for instance, although his attitude towards Italy is much more post-modern than Elizabeth David's was, similarly embraces the image of Mediterranean food as somehow more natural and real. Indeed, in an effort to improve English school dinners, Jamie Oliver relied heavily on this image of Italian food as healthy, even though obesity figures suggest that the Italian diet is not necessarily healthier than the English diet.

All this suggests that the recent English cooking revolution, of which Jamie Oliver is particularly emblematic, has not resolved the culinary crisis of confidence George Orwell wrote about. The English are embracing foreign dishes and ingredients, and becoming more cosmopolitan in general; but their encounters with the foreign remain highly structured by what John Urry calls the *tourist gaze*: their expectations cause them to focus on certain aspects of foreign culture and ignore others. The fantasy of Mediterranean life that follows allows some to indulge in a lifestyle of food and drinks, while criticizing the lifestyles of others. Meanwhile, important differences remain within English culinary culture. Ironically, these are being fought out over notions of authenticity that go unchallenged, and assumptions about the benefits of authenticity that go uninvestigated.

The *Feed me Better!* Campaign

It is very easy for people to say: 'well, you're all right Jamie Oliver, you go to farmer's markets, you're a chef: you get all the best stuff'. Yeah, so what? That's not what this... I am not doing this experiment because I am gonna send my kids to state school, 'cause they aint gonna go to state school, are they? Let's be honest, all right? I'm doing this because I want the kids to eat better food, I want the kids to be healthier, I want them to grow up with better habits; I want us to have a fucking better, cooler, cleverer, healthier nation.

—Jamie Oliver, *Jamie's School Dinners*

From 16 February to 23 March 2005, Channel 4 aired the four episodes of *Jamie's School Dinners*. The show allowed viewers to take a look in the school canteen of the Kidbrooke School in London, which was presented as a typical English school. The school was set as an example; if the food there could be improved, it could be done throughout the country. As such, the programme was a prelude to the *Feed me Better* campaign: a national campaign aimed at improving British School dinners and getting cooking back on the curriculum.

In retrospect, the idea of the show seems to have been a logical outcome of the obsession with good food throughout Britain which had reached a climax in the 1990s, and which had manifested itself in the success of cookery programmes, farmer's markets, and even the restaurant trade in Britain.[1] By taking on school dinners as well, Britain would finally be overcoming its reputation for bad food. After just four weeks, 270,000 people had signed Jamie Oliver's on-line petition. Subsequently, the government set up the "School Food Trust", a body responsible for the quality of school dinners, and it promised to spend an extra £280 million to improve school meals. Also, the budget for ingredients was raised from 37 p per child to 50 p per child in primary schools, and 60 p in secondary schools (Rayner). This is, of course, a major accomplishment and Jamie Oliver has righteously been applauded.

General concern over the quality of school dinners had already been growing in the previous decades, however; and Jamie Oliver was not the first to point out that British children, with

twenty-five per cent of teenagers obese, are amongst the most un-healthy in the world (www.jamieoliver.com). Moreover, when home economics was dropped from the core curriculum in the early 1990s, it led to an "increasing concern that a whole generation of young people have no cooking experience beyond the operation of the mi-crowave" (Humble, 232).

Most reports pointed to the 1980s when quality standards for school dinners were dropped, and the production of school dinners was privatized. Although it is true that many of the nutritional stan-dards for school dinners were relaxed around this time, there is no systematic analysis in *School Dinners* of how—and if—school din-ners used to be better before. Jamie Oliver's position towards cor-porate power, however, became very clear when he targeted the Tur-key Twizzler—a spiral strip of mechanically reproduced turkey meat and more than 40 other ingredients—as the symbol of all that was wrong with school dinners in England: "Fucking Turkey Twizzlers. I tell you what: I'm gonna fucking send a bomb up their factory. If you're watching, mister Turkey Twizler, can you do me a favour and just…" (*Jamie's School Dinners*, second episode). According to Da-vid Joll, however—managing director of the infamous British meat supplier "Mister Turkey Twizzler" Bernard Matthews—the Twizzlers contain only 7 per cent fat: "We have been unfairly treated. Turkey is the least fatty of all meats. The new Twizzlers have only a third the fat level of the average pork sausage, yet you don't hear Jamie Oliver telling people not to eat sausages." (qtd. in Shooter). Nonetheless, the Turkey Twizzler was banned from all schools, and the company has stopped producing them since: "We don't regard it as a knee-jerk reaction to Jamie Oliver's programme, although he has had some in-fluence in us putting the final step in place".

The tradition of mistrust towards large companies, and the masses which support them, is a long one in England. Colin Spencer, for instance, traces back the "inferiority" of English cooking to the nine-teenth century, when industrialisation overtook England in a much

quicker rate than it did the European mainland (244-327). He especially blames multinationals for the erosion of local and national cultures. Both school dinners and the cookery genre on TV have always tried to oppose this trend, out of an awareness which started at the beginning of the 20th century that—for various reasons—the domestic was a matter of national concern. Even though *Jamie's School Dinners* does not give any cooking instruction and is hardly recognizable as a cookery programme, it is, therefore, a logical step in the development of the genre which implicitly has always raised concerns over the food of others.

Ironically, though, many cooks—seemingly on a mission to save English food—have pointed to foreign cultures as an example. There has also developed a more positive branch of thinking about globalization, therefore, which sees the increased availability of different foodstuffs and recipes through various media as an essentially democratic one. Stephen Mennell, for instance, argues that both a relatively free flow of consumer goods and the rise of modern media, together, have created a global village, where distinctions are decreasing. This view, however, denies the fact that many people strongly identify with their food; and that even within national cultures strong differences remain.

The food that Jamie Oliver cooks, is similarly not what would traditionally be understood as English, even though his mission places it firmly within a national discourse. In the first episode, for instance, "[h]e decided to try curry and rice and a simple focaccia". One Mum, who complained that her son would not eat pasta or rice every day of the week, however, was told that she had to talk to a nutritionist, as if only the nutritional aspects of food are important. Of course, parents and schools in England have a responsibility towards the children they feed; but to define what good food is, is very difficult. People strongly identify with their food; and even within national cultures, large and important symbolic differences remain, which research has continuously shown to resist knowledge about healthy eating (Caplan, 18-23).

Indeed, although the name of the campaign—*Feed me better!*—might give the impression that it originated amongst the children themselves somehow, many children, and some of the parents, objected to Jamie Oliver's new regime (See Fig. 2). Looking strictly at the availability of foodstuffs—and their nutritional value—does not offer sufficient insight into this problem; as can be seen from the reaction by head of school, John Lambert: "All the freshly-prepared food served by the school now complies with the Government's healthy eating guidelines. I can't imagine why the children want to go elsewhere". Oliver even said "he was "f****** bored with being polite" and added: "Now is the time to say, 'If you're giving your young children fizzy drinks, you're an a*******, a t****r. If you aren't cooking them a hot meal, sort it out'" (qtd. in Spencer).

Food and Identity

You can never accuse the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver of mincing his words. He was characteristically blunt when he took Alan Johnson to task over Labour's progress on school meals. The Education Secretary told a fringe meeting: 'Jamie Oliver said to me, "You've got to be a bit more Nazi about this." But I don't think they showed that on TV'.

—"Jamie's Grilling"

There has been considerable research into the way that identity and food habits influence each other. Lévi-Strauss, for instance, was fascinated by the fact that in every society there are many things which are not eaten, while edible in principle (insects in England, for instance). Food, he understood, has to be placed in a cultural context which defines it as such. Lévi-Strauss thus understood cooking as a transition between nature and culture; and he treated cooking like language, where the cook inscribes raw ingredients with meaning. The emphasis Lévi-Strauss put on language makes clear how much culinary culture is often imagined to be bound to a nation; and although his search for the phonemes in cooking—the smallest parts of cooking which altered its meaning—never provided the grammar of cooking he was looking for, his theory was very influential in showing that collective identities can be expressed through food.

The problems around the *Feed me Better* campaign, however, have made it painfully clear that culinary cultures are not as easily defined by nationality and geography as is sometimes suggested in cookery books. What we eat is determined by our class, gender and age, as much as by our nationality; and as Bourdieu has noted, even the way we order the table and the way we eat is part of our social status. Moreover, what we eat will also inscribe our bodies, literally, revealing constantly who we are. Slim body images, for instance, are generally associated with self-restraint: according to Bourdieu a typically middle-class value. Within national cultures, therefore, taste is also an important cultural marker.

Although anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss and Pierre Bourdieu have made clear that food touches at the heart of people's individual and collective identities, Stephen Mennell argues that their work did not focus enough on cultural change. He therefore proposes a "developmental" approach to look at how different societies influence each other's culinary culture. According to Mennell, contact between cultures and classes has increased the availability of many foodstuffs for many people, thus creating a democratization of taste. In *All Manners of Food*—a monumental comparison of English and French diets—he summed up the result of this increased contact over the past centuries as one trend: 'increasing varieties, diminishing contrasts'.

When looking at cultural change, cook books are a valuable source. As Mennell points out, printed cookery books have been important in the development (or construction) of national cookery styles; and cookery books have also made it possible to fix and transport certain dishes globally. According to Benedict Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities*, the invention of print capitalism was even a necessary condition to erode previous boundaries, and make it possible to imagine communities on a national scale. Both Benedict Anderson and Mennell, thus, seem to see the development of the nation-state as a natural step in the development towards a global culture. Their work, therefore, echoes Marshall McLuhan's notion of the 'global village', which has been extremely influential in the study of modern media in suggesting that cultural differences are declining because of the increased contact that media provide.

The interpretation of cookbooks is problematic, however. Even though cook books often present national traditions as if it is possible to reconnect with those cultures in a straightforward way, cookbooks are never such neutral representations. As Appadurai has shown, cookbooks (and the cookery genre on TV) often present a kind of culinary fantasy which should not necessarily be understood as instruction; secondly, cookbooks hardly reflect a nation's diet, and will

typically try to construct cultures in a new image; finally there are those that "use recipe books to construct other less 'developed' regions for the consumption of a post-colonial audience well accustomed to situating their own national cultural identity in opposition to the primitive, the exotic, or indeed the authentic" (Floyd, 128). Cookery books, therefore, reveal more about the aspirations of the people that write and read them than about the culture they pretend to describe.

Even though Mennell argues that there is a trend towards diminishing contrasts, therefore, there are two problems with this theory. Firstly, it neglects the way in which taste continues to function as a signifier of social distinction within, or above, a certain culture, as "all the data suggest the continued existence of class differentiation" (Warde, 1997: 124); and secondly, as John Urry comments in Consuming Places, "[t]he collapse of many spatial boundaries does not mean the significance of space decreases" (23). Indeed, class differences are often played out through notions of tradition and authenticity (James, 1996: 90), and since the appearance of Mennell's book there has been a revived interest in 'traditional' English food, with an emphasis on locality and authenticity, which have become important elements in the marketing of food and cookery books.

Class competition is still very much a part of British culture, quite notably in its school system, which consists of public and private schools. According to Bourdieu "[e]ach social class possesses a habitus, the system of classification which operates below the level of individual consciousness and which is inscribed within people's orienting practices, bodily dispositions and tastes and distastes" (Urry: 1990, 88). Furthermore, "[c]lasses in competition with each other attempt to impose their own system of classification on other classes to become dominant. In such struggles a central role is played by the institutions of culture, of education and of intellectuals more generally". The implication of this statement is that those institutions that are usually seen as politically neutral – BBC and their cookery

programmes; schools and their school dinners – exercise an ideological power. It is important to keep this in mind when we hear Jamie Oliver say:

> I am not doing this experiment because I am gonna send my kids to state school, 'cause they aint gonna go to state school, are they? Let's be honest, all right? I'm doing this because I want the kids to eat better food, I want the kids to be healthier, I want them to grow up with better habits; I want us to have a fucking better, cooler, cleverer, healthier nation. (Episode 2: 8:28)

Although Jamie Oliver seems genuinely concerned about a "better, cooler, cleverer, healthier nation", all these notions are highly subjective, and their relation to food altogether unclear. Someone who does not cook, or even eat in a certain way, is not only uninterested in food or acting unhealthily, but is distinctly understood as someone who makes the country less "cool". This is an example of Brunsdon's notion of a *privatisation of the public sphere,* where there is a strong discourse to "improve the personal for the national good" (34).

Even though Jamie Oliver just seems to be offering nutritional advice, many of his remarks are actually more about lifestyle, therefore, than anything else. In one of his interviews, for instance, Jamie Oliver states that 80% of Brits do not sit around a table for dinner, especially "in London and in the big cities of the north", implying that this is out of a lack of interest in food. He continues however: "The people I'm talking about have enormous televisions—a lot bigger than my own—the latest in mobile phones, cars and they go and get drunk in pubs at the weekend. Their poverty shows in the way they feed themselves" (qtd. in O'Neill). Such remarks have not just been greeted approvingly in England. As O'Neill comments in the Guardian:

> Oliver's seeming attack on the habits of 80% of Britain (otherwise known as the masses) exposes what lies behind contemporary food snobbery: actual snobbery. His seamless shift from talking about turkey twizzlers to having a dig at our consumerism (all those enormous TVs) and our fancy for alcohol ("they get drunk in pubs at the weekend") shows that today's obsession with healthy eating often masks a disdain for the lifestyles of the lower orders.

A discourse of national improvement, thus, disguises what is basically a class issue; and behind this concern over the food of others lurks a rejection of their lifestyle in broader terms.

Easthope describes this as "a way of thinking designed to promote the interests of a particular social group, [a]ccording to [which], the idea of a nation, the national state and national unity is a hegemonic deception perpetrated by the ruling class in order to mask its own power". A notion he considers flawed, because it does not account for the way in which the concept of a nation is embraced by all classes (6). This process, however, is not as conscious as Easthope presents it. Foucault—who understands it as neutral, and essential to the development of the modern nation-state—argues that the exercise of this power is not oppressive but rather operated from an internalized awareness that one is part of a community. It is important to understand nationality like this in order to understand the role of television in the way foreign food has come to function in England. The individual is continuously trying to interpret and articulate its own behaviour, thereby affirming the norms of (national) society. The way in which vision operates in this process is especially important for Foucault; and it is remarkable that he did not comment on the working of television. McLuhan, however, has shown that content and medium are intertwined and cannot be separated. The cookery genre, therefore, cannot be understood as just instruction—as the symbolic meaning of food has for various reasons depended on the success of the cookery genre on TV.

TV dinners

> *It is a process that has its disappointments too, of course: the large, aching gap between image and reality, the dish that fails to live up to its author's glowing encomium; the mess, crumbs and bloated stomachs that are the only legacy of your culinary engagement. But when the washing up is done, the kitchen restored to order, the dish is still there, in the cook book—delicious, untouched, full of promise. Reading cook books allows us to eat our cake and still have it, and what could be better than that?*
> —Humble, *Culinary Pleasures* (278)

At first sight, television seems to have brought foreign dishes into the homes of its viewers in a non-threatening way. The power of television is, thus, often understood as liberating and democratizing (Meyerowitz, qtd. in Royek and Urry, 69); and the success of the celebrity chef is explained as a result of its power to formulate (post)modern relations towards the domestic (e.g. Moseley). This optimistic view, however, neglects the fact that television broadcasting cannot obtain the impartiality that it would want to. In TV (or cookery books for that matter) the camera literally directs the view of the audience, so that the audience experiences the dishes vicariously through the celebrity chef. The role of the presenter as a neutral observer is thus exposed to be that of a mediator in the contact between the public and the domestic sphere, or between the foreign and the English.

Indeed, the traditionally very strong border between domestic cooking and public or restaurant food, and the related gender roles, seems to have been waning as a result of the success of the cookery genre on TV. Jamie Oliver's *The Naked Chef*, for instance, specifically shows restaurant food stripped down to variants suitable for the home. But to understand TV as liberating is to forget the tension that is created by the presumption that anyone would want to cook foreign dishes or like a chef. This realization has been picked up by feminist and post-colonial critics of both the genre and the fusion cooking it has produced. Exotic dishes and ingredients, they argue, are represented outside their authentic environment and thus reduced to an object of consumption for a dominant (English) culture (Humble, 250).

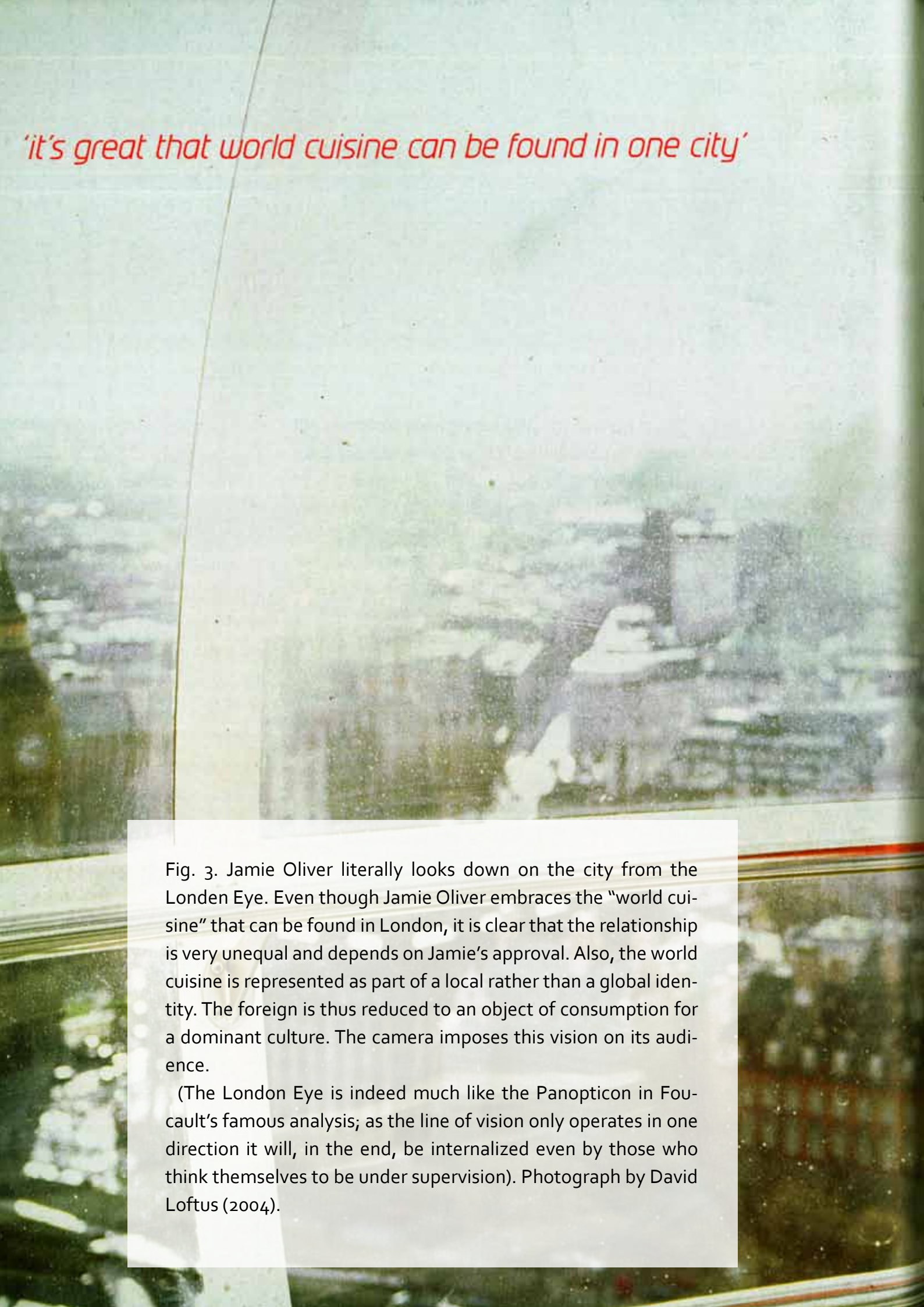'it's great that world cuisine can be found in one city'

Fig. 3. Jamie Oliver literally looks down on the city from the Londen Eye. Even though Jamie Oliver embraces the "world cuisine" that can be found in London, it is clear that the relationship is very unequal and depends on Jamie's approval. Also, the world cuisine is represented as part of a local rather than a global identity. The foreign is thus reduced to an object of consumption for a dominant culture. The camera imposes this vision on its audience.

(The London Eye is indeed much like the Panopticon in Foucault's famous analysis; as the line of vision only operates in one direction it will, in the end, be internalized even by those who think themselves to be under supervision). Photograph by David Loftus (2004).

One of the first explorations of the ideological power of the cookery genre has been the essay "Ornamental Cookery" by Roland Barthes. Its strength lies in its adoption of a linguistic approach to investigate apparently natural cultural phenomena like cookery instruction. Rather than just instruction, Barthes thought that the cookery genre in magazines presented a "dreamlike" cooking. Adopting textual analysis to look at food articles in two magazines, he showed that the presentation of food was more than just ornamentation, and hinted at representing cultural classes. Although Barthes later revised his view of *Mythologies* (Humble, 151), his "Ornamental Cooking" has been very influential for the recognition of recipes as strong ideological texts. Following post-structural thought, like Barthes', Nicola Humble and others have shown that cookery instruction is always a powerful ideological tool, which represents (or does not represent) ideas on what is edible and who should cook. Susan Leonardi has argued, therefore, that recipe books create a strong sense of community. Appadurai even argues that cookbooks hardly reflect a nation's diet, and will typically try to construct cultures in a new image.

In the last decades, television has become increasingly important in the cookery genre. Success on TV, for most cooks, meant guaranteed sales in the cookbook market (Humble, 240), and in general "cook-book publishing has followed the model of television food programmes by commodifying its authors and devoting itself to filling in smaller and smaller niches in the market" (Humble, 242). As TV has become more important, the meaning of the cookery genre has become increasingly inter-textually defined. Television critics have introduced the word *flow* for the way in which—during the process of watching television—the apparently random switching back and forward between programmes creates new, unintended meanings between programmes. The increase of DIY programmes in general—home makeover, gardening and cooking—on UK television, especially since the 1980s, has, thus, deeply embedded food in a discourse of self-improvement, or what is called *lifestyle* in the media; and many broadcasters have now explicitly headed their cook-

ery shows under "lifestyle" on their on line sources (http://www.bbc.co.uk/lifestyle/; http://www.channel4.com/lifestyle/), and the personality of celebrity chefs has become an issue of increasing public concern. Indeed, by no means confined to the television programmes any longer, celebrity chefs and their personalities are now widely discussed in newspapers and tabloids. Also, the cookery show has increasingly been taken outside the studio and into what has been constructed as the home of the cook. Cookery programmes, thus, do not only articulate ideas on how to cook, but also on how to live.

Modern cookery books are similarly promoted as part of a lifestyle, and the importance of photographs has transformed them into lifestyle-icons. Food photography was not fully developed until the 1980s, but has soon become a prominent part of the cookery book afterwards. Of course, some cookery books used photographs long before this date, but these photographs look "strangely unappetizing" to us now (Humble, 58). They were aimed at the lower social classes; upmarket cookery books and magazines often used drawings by well known artists, of the cook or the raw ingredients as "they also had to bear in mind the class implications created by the pictorial styles adopted by different sorts of women's magazines". Since the 1980s, however, the visual aspect has become increasingly important, with almost every recipe now being guided by at least one picture. No longer necessarily used in the kitchen, modern cookery books are much like photo books meant for a prominent place on the coffee table. Every cook book, or cookery programme, therefore, now involves much work of a food stylist, whose sole job is to make the food look more appetizing. Much food, however, is not very photogenic; and there is no law for cookery books which stipulates that the actual food has to be photographed; the substitutes that are used are often inedible. Amongst other techniques Bellingham and Bybee, for instance, give a recipe for fake ice cream consisting of solid shortening, corn syrup, and powdered sugar (168-72). Notice, also, that pictures of soup often show the floating ingredients that would normally sink

to the bottom. In fact, Bellingham and Bybee even warn the reader that

> The first rule is to never eat food that has been on set or handled as a hero. I've always said that it's bad karma to eat photo food. This rule makes good sense not only because hero food is usually handled a lot, but also because it isn't always managed in ways that keep it safe for consumption. In some instances, substances are added or applied to the food that render the food unsafe for consumption. (3)

Food photography, thus, sets standards which cannot be met.

Not only ingredients or dishes are photographed, but photos of people who are often presented as friends have also entered cookery books; and the potential pleasure to be derived from food has also become a prominent subject on TV. Whereas Delia Smith, for instance, still refused to eat her own food in front of the camera (Humble, 236), television shows now often end with a climax were the food is enjoyed in the company of friends. This emphasis on pleasure has drawn attention to its relation to the porn genre. Indeed, many of the techniques to photograph food—soft focus, close up—have been borrowed from porn (some magazines even play overly with the genre of porn by including features specifically associated with porn, like centrefolds) (Bell and Valentine, 6). Moreover, titles of cookery shows like *The Naked Chef* and *Nigella Bites* deliberately try to conjure up sexual connotations which make of the "mmms" and "aahs" ambiguous at least. Indeed, both porn and cookery programmes offer a vicarious pleasure for the viewer: just like porn offers the viewer a fantasy which is far from the bedroom experiences of most people, so does the cookery genre offer culinary fantasies about food and guests not likely to be found at most people's dinner tables.

The comparison between porn and cookery is an interesting one, as pornography is often blamed for presenting unrealistic body images as well as unrealistic images of our intimate life. Together with fashion photography, therefore, it is often blamed for the high occurrence of eating disorders in Western cultures (e.g. Cambell; Greer). The role of the cookery genre has hardly been researched in this light, although

it could be said to have created contradictory discourses of both prohibition and desire towards food (Andrews, 194). According to Jones and Taylor, however, it must not be forgotten that food is also "an object of widespread anxiety" (Jones and Taylor, 186). In December 2001, English newspapers reported on research which showed that in England "Sixty-one per cent of people interviewed insisted they considered [giving a dinner party] worse than attending an interview or going on a first date" (Judd, 5). This insecurity that people felt in the kitchen was specifically seen as the result of the abundance of cookery instruction on TV, and was called "Kitchen Performance Anxiety".[3]

Whereas Roland Barthes still thought that there is such a thing as real cooking, then, of which the cookery genre has become a false copy – Baudrillard saw in the rise of modern media the replacement of reality by the simulacrum. The abundance of cookery programmes has thus created what Baudrillard could have called a "simulacrum of cooking": an idea of what food is, that has no basis in reality. This fantasy is so powerful that it replaces our sense of what real food is. Although this process has been especially noticeable since the appearance of TV, any recipe could be said to present a fantasy. This is especially clear in relation towards foreign food, as becomes clear from Cynthia L. White's "interesting suggestion that the glossy magazines aimed at the wealthier class during the period between 1956 and 1965 (including those for which David wrote) were apparently more concerned to encourage people in collecting food rather than preparing it" (qtd. in Floyd, 130). The image of a Mediterranean meal enjoyed at a large dinner table, surrounded by friends and family has thus become a powerful image.

BBC and the Celebrity Chef

Since the 1990s, there has been a tremendous increase in the popularity of the cookery genre on television and in the printed press. The celebrity chef, whose personality was carefully constructed both in and outside the television shows, was an equally important aspect of the decade. The celebrity chef, however, is far from a new phenomenon; and the cookery genre has been an important part of British television since its earliest days.

In 1927, after a few years of experimentation, the BBC had become state owned and, in order to justify a licence fee for every household, was looking for a place of social relevance in British society. The BBC was one of the first Public Service Broadcasters, and was a model for the development of many broadcasters in Europe. American broadcasters, on the other hand, are funded through commercial advertising. The difference in funding between American and English broadcasters has led to a different role for television in these societies (Gripsrud, 22-4). The BBC has always specifically looked for ways to educate the public; and British traditional reputation for bad food made the cookery program fit nicely with what has stayed BBC's stated mission ever since: "inform, entertain, educate".

The first celebrity chef ever to appear on TV was Marcel Boulestin in 1937; and even before this date the BBC had aired cookery programmes on the radio (Humble, 62). Boulestin's reputation had been set long before his appearance on TV: in 1936, Boulestin had already given a cookery performance on cinema; he gave cookery lessons, and was the author of several successful cookery books on French domestic cooking. Furthermore, he was the owner of Boulestin's: a restaurant in Covent Garden which was famous both for the quality of its food, as for being a meeting place for artists, writers and diplomats from England as well as from the Continent and America. According to Humble he was "without doubt the most important single influence on British cooking between the wars" (61).

Despite his turn to the cookery genre, Boulestin had come to England with considerable literary ambitions, and his appearance on TV

should be understood as the result of his involvement with the intellectual movement that surrounded the medium in England in its earliest days. France, by this time, had become associated in England with a bohemian lifestyle popularized by many artists and writers from England that had went to Paris. The success of Boulestin's presentation of French cuisine bourgeoise—as opposed to haute cuisine—was thus as much a result of England's fascination with French bohemian circles, as it was a result of the general success of French restaurants in England (Humble, 62). The success of Boulestin's cookery books, however, also depended on a new interest in cooking and food amongst the middle classes. His cookery books, like many of their period, were aimed at a generation of middle class women who, for the first time, had to cope without the help of personal servants. Many working-class girls had gotten used to higher wages and more independence during the First World War as they had started to work in factories, and did not want to go back to serving other people (Humble, 50). Cookery books in this period were extremely careful to touch on this subject of servants, often leaving it a matter of interpretation who would do the cooking. When Boulestin addresses the subject in *What Shall We have To-Day?*, he deliberately makes sure not to offend any hostess who was forced to do the cooking herself—Boulestin still presumed the domestic cook was always a woman: "too many persons are inclined to treat a worthy person in an unworthy way, to think of a cook just as a servant performing tedious domestic duties; which is very wrong and asking, in fact, for disaster" (3). This ambiguity is made specifically clear in the words with which he concludes his introduction: "Take an interest in what you are doing, whatever it is, either the cooking or the eating of the food" (9). This emphasis on cooking as something to be enjoyed as much as eating itself is a specifically new element, beginning in the first half of the 20th century. One of the ways to evade the subject of servants was to present food preparation as an intellectual challenge for the housewife. Cookery books of this period started to include

essays on the preparation of food, and became increasingly attractive in their presentation, often looking like poetry books (Humble, 47).

Especially during the economic crisis in the 1920s and 1930s "reduced incomes, increased taxes and a relative decline in political influence had weakened the aristocracy and the old gentry class immediately after the First World War, leaving the upper middle class in the social and political ascendancy. But by the 1930s that ascendancy was being threatened from below by the rapidly expanding and newly influential lower middle class" (53). These class issues were being fought out in the cookery book. With titles like *What Shall We Have To-Day?* and books like *The Evening Standard Book of Menus*, with a lunch and dinner menu for every day of the year, Boulestin's cook books were ambitious in scope. (His maxim: "Good cooking should be the rule, not the exception", would later prove to be a great inspiration for Elizabeth David, the woman who is often credited for the revival in British food after austerity.) There was a general concern, however, with economy in the recipes of this period; which Mennell thinks might be one of the reasons or symptoms for the deplorable state of English cooking—vas he feels that the English are less willing to spend money on their food than, for instance, the French are. This, however, neglects the committed nature of these cookery books and the ambition of their writers, who wanted to make clear that anybody could cook properly, regardless their income.

The wars at the beginning of the twentieth century (the Boer war and First World War) had made clear that Britain had to take care of its working classes to ensure national military strength. At this time, malnutrition was "as widespread in England as it had been during the famines of medieval times" (Jones, 7). Already at the end of the 19th century there had developed a scientific interest in the nutritional aspects of food, and its findings were very close to our modern nutritional system (Humble, 27).[2] These scientific insights about nutrition increasingly led to the idea that the poor did not spend their money rightly, and needed to be educated for the good of the nation.

Scientists and cookery books of this period, therefore, specifically targeted the housewives as guardians not only of the family, but of the nation as a whole. Also, cooking started to be a subject thought at schools which "remained optional for a long time, but was pursued with vigour in some cities" (Mennell, 1985: 231). This, however, only became a matter of government concern when, during recruitment for the second Boer War (1899–1902), it was found that in some areas up to 60 per cent of volunteers had to be rejected as a result of malnutrition; the national average was 40 per cent. This gave rise to an increased awareness that the domestic had an immediate impact on the nation as a whole. Subsequently, local councils were allowed to provide free meals to poor children, which was the start of the school dinner programme in England (Jones, 219). Cynically, school dinners were thus introduced as part of a policy to defend England as a nation, almost in a military sense.

More importantly, behind the newly found interest in the food of others there was a concern over their influence on culture in general, and a rejection of their lifestyles. The rising cultural influence of the masses, as a result of changing economic standards and mass production, had led to an anxiety amongst the literary intelligentsia which was often expressed through food. Although the development of mass produced food had meant an improvement in the diet of most people (Mennell, 1985: 229), mass produced tinned foods, and fast food were thus seen as a threat to culture in general. "[T. S.] Eliot even mentioned as one symptom of the decline of culture in Britain specifically an 'indifference to the art of preparing food'" (qtd. in Mennell, 1985: 328-9). Finally, the image of a mob that roamed the streets to overthrow the establishment was firmly grounded in elite thinking of the period. What was considered to be a decline of the domestic sphere in these years was, thus, increasingly positioned as a matter of public concern. As Humble notes, many men who worked in the cities and lived in suburbs had started in the late 19th century to take "both their midday and their evening meal in clubs or in the chop-houses that were springing up everywhere" (14). Cookery writ-

ers often deliberately involved themselves with this issue, and housewives were explicitly held responsible for their family and the nation as a whole. Cookery books and, since 1937, cookery programs on TV, therefore, were often specifically aimed to tackle this domestic problem.

Even before the age of television, there had been other celebrity chefs, but these did not involve themselves with the domestic. Antoine Carême is generally considered to have been the first, at the beginning of the 19th century. In the 19th century, however, these celerity chefs were mainly French, and concentrated on the development of French Haute Cuisine and of the restaurant trade as a professional business. The restaurant as we know it—with individual portions enjoyed at a private table—stems from this period; and many of its ideas (especially those by Escoffier) continue to be influential today (Mennell, 1985: 159).

Although 19th century French chefs were very influential in the restaurant trade, however, their ideas were of little use in the domestic kitchen; the increased professionalism of the restaurant kitchen, thus, did much to widen the gap between domestic and restaurant cooking in England (Humble, 22). French Haute Cuisine was as popular in the 19th century in England as it was in France, and many French cooks moved to England to set up their restaurants there (Mennell, 1985). This success of French restaurants in England increasingly led to the view that all good cooking was French cooking: a process which Mennell has called the "decapitation" of English cooking, as it stopped the development of English cooking. In the 19th century, French recipes also appeared in English cookery books, for instance in the successful *Beeton's Recipe Book*. These recipes, however, were generally so extravagant that it is doubtful whether many people actually tried to cook from them. It seems much more likely that they were included to give a touch of exoticism to the otherwise quite normal recipes.

Boulestin's work, then, for the first time presented everyday French domestic cooking. Furthermore, he seized the opportunities of TV and radio to express publicly a concern over the state of domestic cooking in the whole of England. Of course, in the 1930s television was not the domestic medium it would become after the war, but, at least in potential, together with radio, it was able to reach a wider public than cookery books alone could be. At the beginning of the War an estimated 20,000 television receivers had been sold, even though the cost of a television set, about a hundred pounds, was close to the working-class annual wage. Many of the television sets ended up in public viewing rooms, at restaurants, stores and even Waterloo Railway Station (Gripsrud, 21). "At least in terms of audience numbers, then, British television in the 1930s was largely a medium for public exhibition" (22). After the War, however, the role of television would change rapidly. The costs of a TV were drastically lowered, and for the first time television entered into the majority of households as a domestic appliance.

Although the BBC had to stop its television broadcasts during the Second World War—as its strong signal would be too easy for enemy bombers to detect—food became a prominent part of government propaganda on the radio. The importance of the domestic as part of the military strength of Britain was widely recognized, and food was specifically positioned as weapon in winning the War. Five days after Britain had declared war on Germany, the ministry of food was established, which "was by far the most significant publisher of information about food during the war years" (Humble, 86).

> Although the [radio] programmes were nominally under the control of the BBC, the Ministry of Food was heavily involved in dictating their content, drafting the scripts, editing those prepared by independent speakers, testing recipes in their own test kitchens in Portman Square and exercising power of veto over the recipes broadcast. [...] one particularly ludicrous situation in January 1943 involved the Ministry insisting that the phrase 'Eat potatoes instead of bread' be

inserted into every broadcast for a month, regardless of its relevance
to the material under discussion. (Humble, 88)

Boulestin offered his services to the ministry of food, but these were
rejected; he died in 1943 (David: 2002, 153).

MINISTRY OF FOOD

THE WEEK'S

FOOD FACTS No 3

Start now to collect these useful advertisements. Pin them up in your kitchen.

PLEASE make full use of the fruit and vegetables now so plentiful. It is important that we should eat home produce rather than food which has to come from overseas. *Never* waste anything, however small. *Never* eat more than enough. You'll be fitter, you'll save money, you'll make cargo space available for materials of war. *Every time you cook you can help or hinder Hitler!*

ON THE KITCHEN FRONT

HEALTH HINT. Among the protective foods, *salads* have a high place. Eat a salad every day while they are so plentiful.

BUTTER PAPER. Always scrape the paper in which butter or margarine has been wrapped. The papers themselves should be saved for greasing baking dishes or covering food while it is cooking in the oven.

REMEMBER that a plate of fresh home-grown fruit (plums for example) makes a refreshing dish. It will save fuel and will help to cut down the nation's consumption of imported food. *You can hear other useful time-and-fuel-saving hints on the wireless each morning at 8.15.*

RECIPE for Vegetable Hot-Pot
Prepare and cut into convenient pieces ½ lb. potatoes, ¼ lb. carrots, ¼ lb. onions and ¼ lb. turnips. Put into a saucepan with a teacupful of hot water, put on the lid, bring to the boil and cook for 15 minutes. Then add a teacupful of shelled peas, ¼ lb; tomatoes and a few sprigs of mint, season with salt and pepper, put on the lid again and cook for 20 minutes more. Strain off the liquid which can be used in preparing a parsley sauce to serve with the vegetables.
Another way: If an ounce of dripping or margarine can be spared it should be melted in the saucepan and the vegetables tossed in it before the water is added to the pan. This much improves the flavour of the hot-pot.
Save food, spare cargo-space, save money!

THE MINISTRY OF FOOD, LONDON, S.W.1

(overlapping leaflet, partially visible)

FOOD FACTS

got through to the Final. ... this: we go into training ... and we discipline our liv... of our national resources... in our manufactures — ... unbeatable.

ON THE K...

How to Salt Runner B...
While runner beans are plent... is an excellent plan to pu... down in salt for winter use.
Allow 1 lb. of salt to 3... beans. Dry the salt and cru... rolling pin. Choose young... beans. Wash, dry thoroug... remove strings. If small, leav... otherwise break into two... pieces. Put a layer of t... stoneware jar, then a layer... Repeat, pressing beans d... Finish with an ample lay... Cover and leave for a few... beans will have shrunk. F... more beans and salt, co... and store in a cool, dry p...
Before use, wash beans... in several waters, then st... water for not more than...

War-time Plum Ja...
If you are making plum... ing during the next 3... try this economical rec...
Grease your preserv... butter or margarine i...

THE MINIST...

Fig. 4. War propaganda presented food as a weapon in winning the war. "Food Facts" by Eric Furgenson.

After the War

As the popularity of cook books, the cookery genre on TV and recipes in magazines took an enormous flight after the War, food continued to be positioned as a matter of public concern. The effect of the cookery genre, however, is difficult to measure as England has also become one of the leading countries in the development of convenience food. After rationing had ended, new technological developments brought new possibilities to the English kitchen and ingredients from all over the world became available. The cookery genre has done much to popularize these newly available foodstuffs, and it has been argued therefore, that traditional borders are fading to make way for a global village. Cookery books, and television shows on cooking, however, have been influenced by the related genre of gastronomic literature, which has always sought to oppose and define different food cultures. While the cookery genre has done a great deal to popularize newly available ingredients and cooking techniques, it has, thus, also been important in the way in which the newly available ingredients from after the War have been interpreted.

The ever rising importance of the cookery genre in BBC's programming since the Second World War, has partly been a reaction to changes in the media landscape. The deregulation of the UK television and radio market, in the 1980s, faced the BBC with increased competition from the commercial sector on satellite television, cable television, and digital television services. The increase of DIY programmes—like cookery, gardening and home makeover—in BBC programming in the prime time evening slot, was an important part of the response of the BBC in facing these developments (Brunsdon et al., 31).

The DIY genre had already proved its potential in the 1960, when women's magazines faced "something of a crisis". According to Mennell "[b]oth Woman's Own and Woman lost over half a million readers between 1962 and 1968 [...]. Though the circulations of these and other weeklies remained very large, they lost ground relatively to a a [sic] number of newer, more 'specialist' monthly women's magazines,

the most successful of which in the 1970s were those centring primarily on cookery and the home" (1985: 259). Moreover, the cookery programmes were relatively cheap to produce compared, for instance, to labour intensive documentaries (Brunsdon et al., 31).

Furthermore, the BBC was able to raise a lot of money through the sale of these shows to foreign broadcasters, accompanying cookery books, internet sites, and magazines in what Niki Strange has called "an example of synergy to rival Disney". Strange even makes the argument that these shows are, in fact, elaborate advertisements and asks whether they should still be part of Public Service Broadcasting. Her point is highlighted by the success of the genre with commercial broadcasters—some, like the Food Network in America, and UKTV Food in the UK—even specializing solely in the cookery genre. Indeed, the success of the genre has created some tension within the BBC itself. View genres lend themselves so well as the cookery genre to product placement, which is formally not allowed in BBC programmes. There are still no advertisements on the BBC; and Jamie Oliver's move to Channel 4 should be understood in the context of the restrictions this put on him. Apart from his cookery books, Jamie Oliver now sells his own line of food and kitchen utensils; and in 2000 he became the face of Sainsbury's supermarkets.

Despite the commercial success of the cookery genre in England, however, it is difficult to measure its effects on eating habits. The output of cookery books since the Second World War has been extremely varied, and many—with titles as the *I Hate to Cook Cookbook*—focussed on the reluctant housewife. Even though such titles seem to offer some relief, they actually made the growing culinary discourse in England increasingly difficult to ignore. The anxieties which this has caused may account for the success of the ready meals market, which developed alongside with the cookery genre, and which was in many ways uniquely British. Still, the UK is responsible for the consumption of half the ready meals sold in Europe (http://www.foodnavigator.com/news/ng.asp?id=18472-uk-meals-ready).

The Second World War has had two lasting effects on the British diet. Firstly, the British became used to ersatz food; and secondly, it trained a generation of professional nutritionists, who had to be Employed commercially after the War (Humble, 104). Maybe because of this, "in terms of integrated logistics and supply chain management, the major UK food retailers were significantly ahead (perhaps as much as ten years) of their North American equivalents at this time [the 1980s], and also in advance of their major continental rivals [...the results were..] the rise and significance within UK food choice of retailer brands and the interrelated development of an innovative and, in many respects uniquely British, chilled ready meals market" (Wrigley, 117). Furthermore, the use of EPOS scanner output by retailers led to increased availability of previously exotic foodstuffs and the erosion of seasonality (121). Freezers, refrigerators and microwaves also soon found their way into the fully equipped post-war kitchens; all these technologies have opened up new possibilities for the dinner table in England.

Amongst others, Mennell and Collin Spencer have argued, therefore, that we now live in a global village where traditional borders are fading. This development is not only viewed positively, however. While it has indeed brought new possibilities to the British consumer, it has also opened up the market for big (multinational) corporations with a standardized offer. The global popularity of fast-food chains like McDonalds, for instance, is often seen as an example of the erosion of national cultures as a result of corporate interest, and a regression of taste in general. The Frankfurt School, therefore, has emphasised that the consumer no longer controls production of its food (Mennell, 1985: 318).

On the other hand, there has also been a recognition of the power of consumer movements in opposing these developments. In the years following the War, for instance, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Food was set up, which resulted in the publication of the first *Good Food Guide* in 1951 (Warde: 2003, 229). The idea that eating out could, or should be a pleasurable experience, however, was

rather modern; and the authors of the *Good Food Guide* took considerable effort to explain what they expected. Whereas its older French counterpart had simply awarded one, two or three stars without discussing the reasons for this decision, the *Good Food Guide* was much more talkative and helped to articulate what good food was.

Cookery books, and television shows on cooking have similarly tried to educate their public and were influenced by the related genre of gastronomic literature. Gastronomic literature had first developed in France as a result of the increase in travel in the 19th century, but soon spread to other European countries (Mennell, 1985: 269). These guides were specifically meant to aid the traveller in his search for a decent meal in an unfamiliar environment. The result of these guides was an increased interest in the various regional cuisines and the culinary guide thus solidified the link between food and tourism. It should not be forgotten, however, that the publisher of Europe's most famous guide was a tyre producer, with a specific interest in stimulating travel on which its existence depended, by emphasizing the differences between various regions. Even though these regional cuisines were generally presented as having a long history, they were, thus, often deliberately invented (Mennell, 2003: 254). Indeed, England's reputation for bad food has been dependent on the linked development of restaurants, tourism, and gastronomic literature in the 19th century (Mennell, 1985: 143). There is no sign, therefore, that a global culture is emerging as place continuous to be important in the symbolic placement of food.

If anything, the effect of the increased contact between cultures seems to have led to an effort to reinterpret, and define Englishness. The success of foreign cooking in English restaurants was described in the *Good Food Guide*, for instance, as such:

> Hundreds of dishes, in scores of restaurants, do not fit easily into any single national framework. [...] What a glorious mix [...] And this particular brew could only happen here. No other country has quite the same blend of British, French, Italian, Spanish, Indian, Chinese,

Thai and other cultures to call on. In that sense, diverse as it all is, it is very British, full of real invention and the sheer exuberance of let's-have-a-go cookery [...]. It is British in the sense that Britain is the melting pot. British cooking is no longer defined by just what we grow here, or by traditional recipes and techniques. It is the sum of what we cook here (Ainsworth, Good Food Guide 1995. qtd in Warde, 2003: 237).

In the same spirit, but with a more political agenda, foreign secretary Robin Cook was inspired by the success of chicken tikka masala to the following words in 2001:

"Chicken Tikka Massala [sic.] is now a true British national dish, not only because it is the most popular, but because it is a perfect illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external influences. Chicken Tikka is an Indian dish. The Massala [sic.] sauce was added to satisfy the desire of British people to have their meat served in gravy" (http://www.guardian.co.uk/race/story/0,,657407,00.html).

Even Allison James, who looked at the success of foreign food in supermarkets and take-aways, instead of restaurants, argued that:

In 1991 [...] chili con carne, chicken tikka masala and lasagna were the best sellers in Tasks precooked food range [...] and, in 1993 it was reported for the fast-food sector in Britain that Indian take aways now outnumber fish and chips shops [...however...] Britishness may be continuing to be marked out in the appearance and ready acceptance of creolised foreign food: bearing the traditional British culinary markers of a concern with saving time and money, creolised food is, ironically, a kind of foreign food which characterizes what is truly British about contemporary food consumption in Britain" (James, 81-84).

This reaction is typical of the way in which food is reinterpreted in a national discourse. Firstly, it shows a disdain for those who have let their national culture (if there was one) be replaced by creolised food; secondly, there is a strained effort to continue to define Englishness in this globalized context. Indeed, the invention of the concept of English cooking has depended on the exposure to other cultures, and on cookery writers trying to interpret this development.

Elizabeth David and the Construction of National Tradition

It is widely accepted that English food has never been healthier than it was during rationing in and after the Second World War (Jones, 219). Government took almost full control of production, and food was evenly distributed amongst the people. Because of this, real hunger was probably less common than ever before. Furthermore, as a result of active government promotion and an extensive reorganisation of the farming industry—aimed solely at increasing England's independence—people ate less meat and eggs, which in large quantities can be harmful to one's health, and more vegetables. As Humble notes, however, the cultural aspects of cooking had been forgotten and eating had been reduced to feeding "with all it's animal connotations" (8). While war propaganda had successfully presented food as an instrument in winning the war, rationing had hardly been opposed; with the War won, however, few people in England could understand why rationing continued.

As early as 1945, just after the Second World War, George Orwell tried to open up the discussion when he published his "In Defence of English Cooking". In this essay, Orwell contested the view that all English food was incompetent and imitative and blamed rationing for killing off English cultural heritage: "At present one can not do much about it, but sooner or later rationing will come to an end, and then will be the moment for our national cookery to revive" (254). The main point of the article—which is hardly more than a list of English ingredients and recipes—is that the English should take pride in their culinary heritage; even though George Orwell has to admit that "it is commonly said, even by the English themselves, that English cooking is the worst in the world" (54) and that therefore "[t]he first step towards an improvement will be a less long-suffering attitude in the British public itself" (56). As they say, however, there's no arguing with taste, and he has some trouble to back up claims like: "It is far better to cook new potatoes the English way—that is, boiled with mint and then served with a little melted butter or margarine—than it is to fry them as is done in most coun-

tries" (55). What becomes clear from Orwell's commentary, however, is that he had already interiorized the foreigner's view:

> And yet it must be admitted that there is a serious snag from the foreign visitor's point of view. This is that you practically don't find good English cooking outside a private house. If you want, say, a good, rich slice of Yorkshire pudding you are more likely to get it in the poorest English home than in a restaurant, which is where the visitor necessarily eats most of his meals [...] It is a fact that restaurants which are distinctively English and which also sell good food are very hard to find. (56)

Orwell's defence of English cooking, therefore, depended on a contact with the other, without which he could not have formulated the Englishness he referred to.

George Orwell was certainly not the only one to despair over the situation of English food in these years. Ironically, however, the woman who is now often credited as having saved the British diet from the dull flavours of austerity is Elizabeth David, whose importance is defined by her earlier works, *A Book of Mediterranean Food* (1950), *French Country Cooking* (1951), *Italian Food* (1954), *Summer Cooking* (1955), and *French Provincial Cooking* (1960), "rather than her later writing of English food in the 1970s" (Floyd, 129). Her books, however, should not be understood as embracing foreign food, as her recipes are highly structured by the idea—important in cultural thinking in Britain at the time—that Mediterranean rural life provided a contrast for the British to compare themselves to. "More particularly," as Floyd argues, "it was far from unusual to find food and the contrast between British and European cooking used to prove the argument about a diminution of British cultural life [in general]" (135).

The peak of Elizabeth David's direct influence probably occurred in the mid 1960s when her books were reprinted for a mass audience by Penguin books, and delicatessens opened throughout the country to make the ingredients she spoke of available to a wide audience. At the

same time David's books are said to have sparked an interest in travel towards the Mediterranean. And yet, as Floyd mentions, "[t]here is an unwillingness, in the frankly hagiographic field of commentary of David, to acknowledge that this national treasure, apparently bent on a mission to wake the nation up to what they were eating and what they had become, actually showed little interest in appealing to or engaging with an audience outside a social élite" (131). Moreover, she wrote about ingredients in quantities which were simply unavailable at the time of writing. Published in 1950, at the height of England's austerity, A Book of Mediterranean Food, famously contained recipes like "Turkish stuffing for a whole roast sheep" when the meat ration was only a few ounces a week (Norman, 33). It has been commented, also, that David's recipes are of little use as instruction, as they are too vague (Floyd). Apparently, what these recipes signified was more important than actual instruction.

It is significant, therefore, that Elizabeth David had some trouble finding a publisher until she met John Lehmann. Although his company focussed mainly on the publication of the work of intellectuals and had no specific interest in food, he accepted Elizabeth David as its only cookery writer. Indeed, her attitude towards food is unusually scholarly, as can be seen, for instance, by her use of bibliographies—a feature not often found in cookery books. Also, she tried to emphasise the importance of her subject by citing "the recollections of literary antecedents, quoting canonical figures bearing the highest cultural capital, such as Henry James and Gertrude Stein, and travel writers with high artistic aspirations, such as Robert Bryon and [...] Norman Douglas" (Floyd, 133). More importantly, however, her writing of the Mediterranean resonated with those strands of literary activity, Edwardian and Modernist, that marked a sense of the diminished possibilities of the urbanised, industrial society in Britain. The habit of cherishing the elaborate rituals of Mediterranean peasant life for their primitivism and authenticity, of celebrating the supposed simplicity of the daily lives of peasants, died hard in Anglo-American letters in the first half of the twentieth century. (131)

Indeed, Elizabeth David constructed the Mediterranean as an example:

> These are the details which complete the flavour of a Mediterranean meal, but the ingredients which make this cookery so essentially different from our own are available to all; they are the olive oil, wine, lemons, garlic, onions, tomatoes, and the aromatic herbs and spices which go to make up what is so often lacking in English cooking: variety of flavour and colour, and the warm, rich, stimulating smells of genuine food. (13)

And yet, Elizabeth David did not simply embrace the Mediterranean; in *Italian Food*, for instance, she writes:

> The excessive use of cheese, the too frequent appearance of tomato sauce, the overworking of the frying pan (expert as Italian cooks are with it), too heavy a hand with powerful herbs, are some of the points at which fault could be found with the Italian kitchen. There is no reason, however, why we should not combine the best which it has to offer (and the best in Italy is extremely good) with materials at our disposal in this country [England]. [...] We could benefit from Italian methods of frying and grilling fish; and as we have not one single fish soup in common use in this country, could we not invent one? (19)

By focussing on specific aspects of foreign food, Elizabeth David was able to detach them from their original cultural background and to incorporate them in an English discourse on cooking, which was yet to be invented.

However, there is an insistence on the importance of authenticity in her works; Elizabeth David seems to struggle with the notion, for instance, in her book Italian Food:

> I can't help wondering how we should feel if Italian cookery writers were to retaliate by asserting that a Welsh Rabbit is made with polenta cakes and Gorgonzola, or steak and kidney pudding with veal and tomatoes and a covering of macaroni. The point is, how far can you go in attaching the names of internationally known specialities to concoctions which have only the flimsiest relation to the originals? To what extent can you rely on the ignorance of your readers to get

away with the practice? Should that ignorance be exploited in the cause of selling some nationally advertised ingredient? Should it be exploited at all? (16)

And although she continues: "adaptations do of course have to be made", any adaptation she makes, whether for matters of taste of for matters of availability is carefully justified, and the original from which it is derived is always given. Although Elizabeth David presents the Mediterranean as an example, therefore, her emphasis is really on what English cooking is often lacking: the flavour and colour "of genuine food". Her comparison, thus, is not between traditional English and traditional Mediterranean culture; it is between the 'flavour and colour of genuine food' still present in her image of the Mediterranean, and already lost in England.

Although there had been considerable attention for foreign food in the cook books from before the Second World War, Elizabeth David was indeed the first to give a structured account of her travels throughout the Mediterranean, creating a triangular relationship between the reader, herself, and the foreign culture or dish. While in popular perception, therefore, the influence of Elizabeth David was to ignite an interest in the foreign, she emphasized the foreignness of these dishes to make a point about British cultural life in general.

The revival of traditional English culinary culture which would take place in the 1970s depended on this contrast with Mediterranean food and the emphasis on authenticity that the work of Elizabeth David had offered. Elizabeth David wrote some cookery books about English food herself (straying even further from the recipe format, to write in a more essay-like style); and she helped others, like Jane Grigson, by recommending them to her publisher. So even though she introduced many ingredients and techniques into an English discourse; by opposing Mediterranean food to British eating habits she also helped to define the latter. As Jones and Taylor note, however, the "recovery of this English tradition often entailed its invention". Moreover it entailed a confused position towards the cultural and historic background of particular dishes.[4]

Whatever her direct influence on British eating habits, Elizabeth David's influence on other cookery writers and on the cookery genre on TV cannot by underestimated. The seriousness which she brought to the genre eventually led to the idea that there was something like quintessential dishes and cooking methods. This caused a trend amongst cookery writers to focus on the search for the best methods and ingredients from around the world. Finally, it is significant that at this point she only focussed on the aesthetic aspects of food and not on the nutritious aspects – which would spark a renewed interest in Italian food in the 1990, after a series of conferences that suggested its nutritional benefits.

Jamie's Italy; Post-modern Culinary Tourism

With *Jamie's Great Italian Escape*, the cookery genre on television has taken a new turn: as not one meal could be prepared from the information given in the show, it could be said to be a travel show as much as a programme on cooking. The programme is accompanied by a cookery book and a website, however—and it could also be understood as a commercial for those. However the programme is understood, Italy is very important in the placement of the food presented, both in the show and in the accompanying cookery book.

Jamie Oliver dedicates his book *Jamie's Italy* partially to Elizabeth David, as one of the people "who have helped [him] fall in love with Italy". His position towards Italian culture, however, is very different from that of Elizabeth David, who positioned herself as a traveller who described her encounters with the authentic, often emphasizing the foreignness of a recipe. When she changed a dish, she did so because she thought it would taste better, and gave full acknowledgement of her decisions. Jamie Oliver, on the other hand, positions himself as a tourist. Authenticity, for him, is no longer an issue; and his versions of Italian food are offered as a pastiche. Jamie Oliver even rejects the idea of authentic Italian cuisine as a lack of open mindedness on the part of the Italians. Italy, as it is presented to the viewer, is indeed Jamie's Italy; and it is deliberately constructed as such by showing Italians refusing to eat Jamie's food.

Although Jamie's relation towards Italian culture is much more post-modern than Elizabeth David's was, this does not mean that the notion of place has become meaningless in his work. Italy, as a concept, is always present in his work, through what John Urry has called the *tourist gaze*: on the basis of what we expect from media images, certain aspects off a specific culture are fore grounded, while others are ignored as atypical. The image which Jamie Oliver presents of Italy is indeed very much structured around a tourist gaze in that it fits the ideas that have been formed on the basis of tourism and the idea that Italian food is healthy.

Fig. 5. On the basis of what we expect from media images, certain aspects of a specific culture are foregrounded, while others—such as the existence of large scale supermarkets and slaughterhouses in Italy, for instance—are ignored as atypical. Photograph by David Loftus (2005).

Jamie's Italy, at times, even reads like a tourist guide—in the introduction, for instance, Jamie Oliver writes:

> Italy has now become incredibly easy and cheap to get to, and this means many more of us can now go there. My best advice is to get out of the touristy places and into the real Italy, where good food and wine do not cost much. If you go to tourist spots you may well get ripped off. If you use some basic Italian phrases, put a smile on your face, have enthusiasm for food and a twinkle in your eye, you can pretty much guarantee that you'll be looked after by the Italians. (xv)

This advice to "get out of the touristy places" is of course a double bind paradox. Imagine how poor Dario, the butcher in Chianti, would feel if all of Jamie's readers would take the following literally:

> And I want you to experience it too. I want you to walk past the wall of footballing posters in Palermo and chuckle because you've seen it here. I want you to go and find the old woman making polenta in the town of Bari in Puglia. Or go and visit the lovely people who run the Petrolo estate in Tuscany, or the family-run Agriturismo La Grotta dei Folletti in Le Marche. I want you to go and see Dario the butcher in Panzano in Chianti and shake his hand. Tell him you're a friend of mine and ask him if you can try his sushi del Chianti. I want you to buy twelve artichokes from the weathered old codger in the market in Rome who picks and prepares and removes the chokes so quickly that it would make the most highly decorated Michelin-star chef in the world look like an amateur, and then I want you to go home and cook two recipes using artichokes. (xiii)

Dario is presented as one of the typical Italian butchers with love for food and for his customers, and he distracts our attention from the existence of large supermarkets in Italy.

Indeed, the food in *Jamie's Italy* is structured as a tourist experience, which can be enjoyed without leaving home: "Anyway, I'll stop raving and fantasizing and will just get on and make a bloody good soup – just don't expect steaming broths or Heinz tomato soup consistency like some of my restaurant customers do sometimes... we're in Italy now" (63). This attitude towards Italian culture, as a land of leisure, partly sips through in his recipes as well. Consider this final stage

for the recipe for risotto: "Stage 4: Remove from the heat and add the butter and Parmesan. Stir well. Place a lid on the pan and allow to sit for 2 minutes. This is the most important part of making the perfect risotto, as this is when it becomes amazingly creamy and oozy like it should be. Eat as soon as possible, while it retains its beautiful texture" (130). Walking to the table would have the same effect; leaving the risotto stand for two minutes is absolutely ridiculous and Elizabeth David does not mention it at all. The texture of the risotto, however, or even its taste, is relatively unimportant compared to what the recipe "signifies": a world of leisure, where "the most important part of making the perfect risotto" is just take a rest for two minutes.

In the same spirit, the question of money is evaded. In *Jamie's Italy* we can read:

> [In Italy, u]ndertaking manual labour, like olive picking, to an old age is very common. In Tuscany some of the best olive oil producers still pay their workers in olive oil, not cash. For 4 to 6 weeks of the year olives are picked and many families give up their time to do this hard manual labour. A good olive-picker can pick up to 90 or 100 kilos a day, and depending on how much oil the olives give (this is obviously dependent on the weather conditions each year) the pickers receive around 5 to 6 litres of oil for their work. Can you imagine someone from Britain doing this amount of hard graft for that? Mind you, the workers love it because the government can't tax them on it and it gives them olive oil for their families for a whole year. (xiv)

Italy, here, is presented to fit its image as a land of holidays, where nobody has to care about money. Not only do the workers "love" doing "hard manual labour" without being paid for it, the Italians are presented as having nothing to do but wait for those "4 to 6 weeks of the year" when they can pick olives. In fact, only olives meant for the most expensive olive oils are picked by hand these days, but this is the kind of fantasy that is creating the food miles of which Jamie, at other points, is so critical. The image of the Italian farmer is so deeply grounded in popular imagination that other olive oil producing countries, like Spain, Greece, Turkey and Tunisia export large quantities to Italy, to be bottled there as "imported

from Italy" (Moore). Greece, for instance, is the largest producer of olive oil, but 75 percent of its exports go to Italy, where it is combined with the local variety and resold as "Italian" (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1571/is_34_18/ai_92084047).

Italy is not only presented as a land of leisure, however; Jamie Oliver's trip is also meant (like a holiday) to re-inspire him: "I wanna find out why Italians are so passionate about food. I also want to find out why the average Italian family eats so well, while millions of British families eat such scrote" ("Jamie's Italian Escape" Episode 1). Indeed, Jamie Oliver expects a remarkable influence from his contact with Italian food: "I think it is gonna make me a better cook, I think it is gonna make me a better husband, I think it is gonna make me a better boss" (Episode 1). This emphasis on self-realization fits with the whole discourse of self improvement or lifestyle that surrounds the cookery genre. It is in this sense that Jamie Oliver and Elizabeth David really present the same thing: a contrast to British cultural life.

By cooking for the Italians –something Elizabeth David never did – Jamie positions his trip as a challenge as well: "I am going to be cooking for some of the toughest food experts in the world [...] I tell you now, not many English cooks would have the bollocks to do this" (Episode 1). Even though the Italians are presented as food experts, however, their refusal to eat Jamie's food is seen as a lack of open-mindedness: "I'm quite shocked: Every Italian I've met is a food expert, or at least has an opinion about food, but they are much less open minded than I had expected" (Episode 1). It is clear, thus, that Jamie Oliver tries to present Italian food in a certain image. This becomes even more clear when he says that what he'd like the reader to do "is stop being British and putting up with sub-standard products—be a bit more Italian and have your say on a regular basis" (177). He does not say "be a bit more like the Italians", which would be logical, but he urges the reader to be "more Italian". Nationalism is no longer presented as something fixed, but as representing something you can be to a certain degree. A British person then—maybe Jamie Oliver himself—might become "more Italian" than the Italians themselves. Indeed, he says: "the truth

is, when I am in Italy I feel Italian—even with my very basic grasp of the language I manage to get by, and you know why? Because like all Italians, I love my family for better or for worse and because food has been something I've grown up around" (x). Although the implication of these words—that the British do not love their families, or grew up without food around—seems hard to swallow, what is significant here is what being Italian represents.

Nicola Humble makes the point that the fantasy of the Mediterranean farmer, who is somehow still in natural contact with the land he works on, has become increasingly important in the awareness of modern urban society, especially in relation to the anxieties that result from modern day large-scale farming techniques. Especially important has been the concern over zoonosis—the possibility of humans catching animal diseases—as, in the past three decades, a series of food scares has contributed to the idea that modern food production is somehow unnatural. In the 1980s there was a scandal of salmonella; in the 1990s the English, who had always been famous for their 'roast beef', had to take a blow to their national self-esteem when their beef was banned in the EU because of BSE; and finally there was the bird's flew in 2005. As Humble says:

> the fantasy of the peasant's harmonious relationship to the sources of his food was only one of the outcomes. Another was the massive increase in the visibility and popularity of organic food, to the extent that 75 per cent of British households now regularly buy some organic foodstuffs (Humble, 253).

But there is another reason for the success of the Mediterranean food in England. In the early 1990s, there were a series of influential conferences on public health and diet, which "put together evidence that had begun emerging in the 1950 indicating that people living in the Mediterranean basin had significantly lower levels of heart disease compared to other populations" (Humble, 250). The outcomes of this research were easily tied up with the image of Elizabeth David's ideal of the Mediterranean farmer still in natural contact with its land. Importantly, however, in concentrating on the risk

of heart disease, this research ignored other problems such as rising obesity and related diabetes and high blood pressure (Humble, 305). The diet that it represented also had little to do with the Mediterranean diet. As Humble says:

> what was de-emphasized in most accounts was that this diet reflected a way of life that had disappeared. The original research focused on tiny groups of men in Crete and Sicily in the 1950s and 1960s, living in small isolated communities, eating diets that were the product of poverty and hardship. [...] The Mediterranean diet was essentially a fantasy, one that promised us health and long life while allowing us to indulge in fat and alcohol (251).

The image of rural life in Italy, which is no more than a fantasy, has thus become seen as the real Italy, while other aspects—the existence of large scale supermarkets and slaughterhouses in Italy, for instance—are ignored. It is important to remember, however, that the image of Italian food is a fantasy, and that obesity figures amongst teens are nearly as high in Italy as they are in England (see fig. 5), when Jamie Oliver self-consciously asserts:

> When I was in Altamura, in Puglia, I visited a school where they were eating baked pasta for their school lunch, bizarrely enough! However, Italian government laws state that the schools must use organic pasta and extra virgin olive oil, and they also had freshly made mozzarella! When made properly like this, it's absolutely delicious. This was the recipe that was made for 1,000 kids at the school I visited and it was very, very good. (*Jamie's Italy*, 114)

By visiting the school in Italy Jamie Oliver embraces the intertextuality that he knows will define the meaning of any of his highly successful programmes; and the image of Italian food—as uncorrupted by the influences of corporate power—is drawn into his School Dinner Programme. Apart form its taste, and it being 'organic' food, however, there is no explanation of why this food is so "very, very good", and there is no nutritional comparison or analysis to the British school dinner system. But then again, how could anything called "extra virgin", harvested, or so is suggested, by Italians not interested in any way in profits, harm our children?
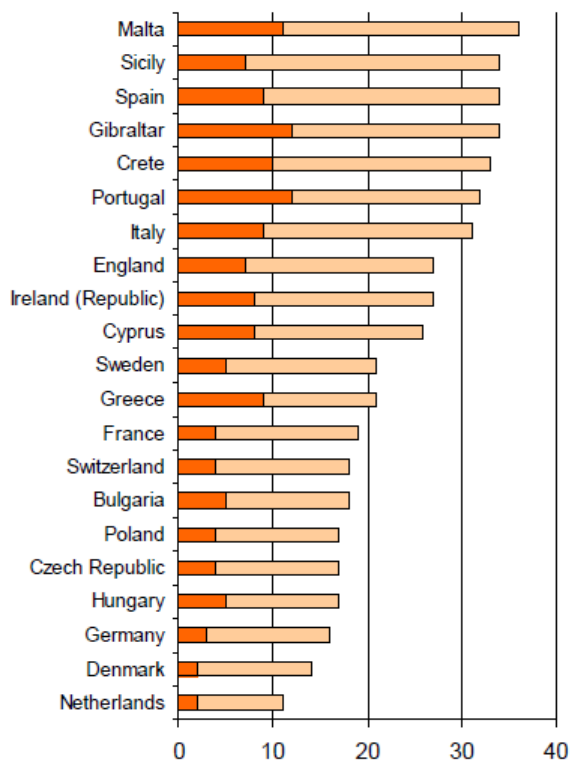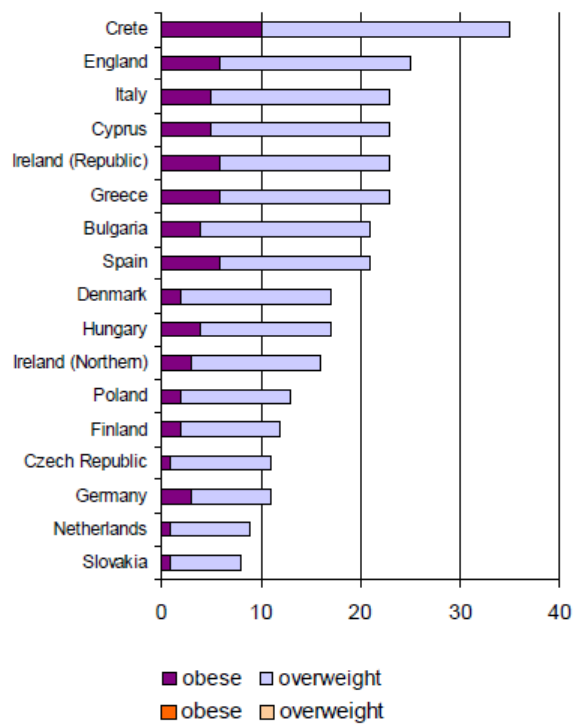
Fig. 5. "Overweight and Obesity in Children" from Lobstein et al.

Conclusion

As television shows like Jamie Oliver's are sold throughout the western world, the image that is presented therein of certain cultures becomes fixed and highly symbolic. Jamie's School Dinners, for instance, has been sold to many different countries (at least thirteen), which seemingly had little to do with what was basically a national matter (Lepper). Many of the countries to which it was sold did not even have school dinners. The programme's focus on a natural way of life without processed foods, however, stirred up something which was much more elementary than the school dinner system in England alone: a distrust of (global) corporations in general.

The rise of modern media and mass culture has increasingly led to the view that (national) cultures are declining to make way for a global village. Food is often seen as one of the first ways to make contact with other cultures; and the way in which certain ingredients, recipes and dishes have migrated from one culture to another, is thus often used as an illustration of this cultural change. While some have seen this shift as a liberating and essentially democratic one; others have pointed at the increased influence of multinationals in dictating the market. The lack of nutritional value in convenience and fast foods is seen, by those, as symptomatic of the way in which cultures are undermined quite literary by corporate interest.

Cookery programmes have always looked for ways to defend English cooking from the influence of mass culture. The cookery programme, thus, fitted nicely with the BBC's ideal of educating the nation, and has been a crucial part of its programming since its earliest days. Ironically, however, many celebrity chefs have resorted to foreign dishes in their defence of English cooking. Especially the image of Mediterranean rural culture—as somehow still in natural contact with food—has become pivotal in defence of a local attitude towards food. This image of a life somehow more natural is extremely important in the *Feed me Better* campaign as well; and the adoption of foreign dishes in *Jamie Oliver's School Dinners* programme and *Feed me Better* campaign is, therefore, is mainly symbolic.

Although this image of Mediterranean food has, especially since the 1990s, been defended by pointing at the nutritional value of these dishes it is based primarily on fiction—as it does not represent the way in which Mediterranean people eat. Moreover, the image of food that is given in TV shows and cookery books, in general, is hardly attainable at all. The cookery genre has thus become involved in producing a simulacrum of food, in which it no longer reflects real food, but offers a fantasy of what food should be.

Notes

1 In April of that same year, British restaurant the "Fat Duck" was named the best restaurant in the world by an international poll of chefs and critics in the annual list of "the World's Best Restaurants" in the magazine "Resaurant".

2 Unfortunately, much of the advice that was given then was aimed primarily at increasing rising protein intake. "In the UK, state food policies created between 1930 and 1950 had encouraged expanded consumption of meat protein, dairy products and sugars which, while serving to provide cheap sources of concentrated energy and thus promoting growth in young people, had unforeseen detrimental long-term consequences for mature adults. Substantially increased proportions of food taken from sugar, hard fats and meat resulted in a diet 'whose composition was unlike that ever eaten before, at any time in history, anywhere in the world' (Cannon, 1993: 5). Since the 1960s, reports from the UK and USA, as well as from the World Health Organization, have identified a causal link between dietary trends and the spread of new diseases and causes of death. But the UK government remained reluctant to introduce new policies or to issue dietary guidelines which might encourage altered eating habits" (Warde, 1997: 207). This shift of interest might have given the impression that nutritionists did not know themselves, which has increased anxiety.

3 One of the results of these anxieties might be an increased occurrence of eating disorders. Eating disorders occur almost exclusively in white middle class families (albeit mostly amongst girls, boys increasingly face the same problems) (Caplan). As some feminist writers have already pointed out, this might well be the result of the obsession with food (and body images) in modern media, with cookery programmes portraying images of meals similarly distant from reality as the body images portrayed in fashion photography.

4 Consider the following part of a recipe for fish and chips by Heston Blumenthal:

> Pinpricking the chip as soon as it comes out of the water in the first cooking, allowing steam to escape more easily, worked pretty well, but the thought of stabbing each chip nearly 25 times was a little impractical, to say the least. I then discovered a desiccator. This is a container with a valve on the side that can be fitted to a pump. When the pump is on, it sucks air and, with it, excess moisture from whatever is inside it, particularly when the food is put in it while still warm. (http://www.guardian.co.uk/weekend/story/0,3605,740821,00. html)

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