Department of Geography University of Sheffield

NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF BRITISH CULINARY CULTURE

Polly Russell

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2003
ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to explore culinary culture as a process around which identity – across a range of scales – is reproduced. It examines the relation between narrative constructions of self and the material practice of food production for individuals involved in the production of culinary culture. The research explores food’s relation to identity by examining the oral history life stories of 40 individuals involved in the food industry in England. By focusing on food producers the research examines how discourses of identity (such as race, class and gender) are reproduced by, through and against narratives of food production (such as multiculture, domesticity and authenticity). Neither food nor identity are examined as knowable ‘things’, but as negotiated processes that are mutually constituted through a range of different yet related discursive practices. Life story interviews provide a means of examining food’s relation to identity as shifting, provisional, nebulous, contestable and contingent. Moreover, the life story approach makes possible an analysis of food production and consumption through narrative accounts of a person’s life. By interrogating the intersections of food, subjectivities and histories, and commercial retail practices, the research situates the individual within the sphere of production. In so doing the thesis assesses the relation between work and home, food production and food consumption, narrative and practice, and their relation to discourses of identity and food in contemporary Britain.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and encouragement of a number of people. The research was funded by the ESRC as part of a CASE studentship between the British Library National Life Story Collection (BLNLSC) and the Geography Department at the University of Sheffield. I should like to thank both institutions for the contributions they have provided, in different ways, to the progression of my research. I would especially like to thank Cathy Courtney, Melanie Unwin and Sue Bradley at the BLNLSC for their unswerving support and friendship over the last three years, and to Dr Nicky Gregson from Sheffield University for her advice on my early attempts to work out what I was doing. I would also like to thank the BL Map library staff who have provided me with desk space and peace and quiet in a crowded building.

Most of all I would like to thank my two primary supervisors Dr Robert Perks and Professor Peter Jackson. Rob has offered invaluable advice and expertise about oral history but has also trusted me to get on with it and for this I thank him. Peter has provided uncomplaining support over the three years. Despite my frequent demands on his time, he has always been ready with practical advice and encouragement. I feel extremely lucky to have had two such supervisors.

I would also like to thank my narrators for their willingness to give days, often weeks, to the life story process and to this project.

In addition I must thank family and friends who have put up with me over a process which, I’m sure, they felt would never end. In particular I’d like to thank my mum, dad, Mandy and Robert for providing places where cups of tea, glasses of wine, delicious food and comfy beds were always on offer.

Clare, thank you for getting me into this and through this, for your scholarly advice, your ability to put things in perspective, your capacity for chat and your precious friendship.

Paul Scoff-Head for generously sharing your brilliance, your ability to talk about everything in ways that challenge and inspire and therefore for giving me the energy to go on.

Mostly though I would like to thank you Steve for making everything possible. Without you none of this would have happened and I dedicate this thesis to you.
To Steve
CONTENTS

Abstract 2

Acknowledgements 3

Dedication 4

Contents 5 - 7

List of Figures 8

Chapter 1 9
1.1 Introduction: The Thesis 9
1.2 Discourse and Narrative 11
1.3 Why Food to Examine Identity? 13
1.4 Geographies of Food, Food Chains and Material Culture 17
1.5 Food & Commercial Culture 21
1.6 Thesis Outline 21

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework 27
2.1 Introduction 27
2.2 Identity as Process 29
2.3 Narrative Identity and Life Stories 36
2.4 Food and Identity 41
2.4.1 The Materiality of Food and the Production of Boundaries 41
2.4.2 Food and the Process of Group Identity 42
2.4.3 Narratives of Identity and the Food Industry 47
2.5 Consumption and the Neglect of Production 49
2.5.1 Consumption as a Project of identity 49
2.5.2 Two Alternative Approaches: Commercial Culture and Commodity Chains 56
2.6 Food Production, a Thoughtful Practice 61
2.7 Summary 65
PAGE MISSING IN ORIGINAL
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Thesis

Before I started my PhD research I worked as a Food Product Developer for Marks & Spencer (M&S). One day after work I was travelling home in a black cab and the driver and I started talking. He asked me what work I did at M&S and I briefly described my job. We then had an exchange along the following lines:

Taxi driver: What are you developing at the moment?
Me: Well, something called gefilte fish actually, a Jewish speciality.
Taxi driver: Gefilte fish! gefilte fish! I’m Jewish, I love gefilte fish. That’s great, M&S doing gefilte fish!
Me: Yes it’s interesting, it’s not something I’m familiar with.
Taxi driver: You mean you’re going to make gefilte fish and you’re not Jewish! I can’t believe it.
Me: Well, I’ve been researching some recipes...
Taxi driver: Where are you getting the recipe from? How will you know that you’re tasting the right thing? It’s a very specific thing, one wrong ingredient and all of North London is going to be laughing at you.
Me: Yes, everyone keeps telling me. The recipe I’m using is from Claudia Roden’s Jewish cookery book
Taxi driver: Claudia Roden, what does she know, she’s from Egypt, they don’t eat gefilte fish in the Middle East. My mother makes the best gefilte fish, everyone says so. You have to speak to my mother. I’m going to give you her number - you call her and ask for her recipe. You can’t put carrot in, if you put carrot in no real Jewish person’s going to eat them. I can’t believe they’ve got you making gefilte fish and....

The encounter, reconstructed from memory, encapsulates a number of issues about food, food production and the politics and practices of identity that are the focus of my thesis. In particular, food is bound up with a host of cultural expectations and assumptions. The taxi driver’s consternation that a non-Jewish person was going to try and mass-produce gefilte fish emphasises how food and identity are commonly understood to be mutually constituted. The taxi driver implies that gefilte fish can only be made successfully by a Jewish person familiar with Jewish customs. More specifically, according to him, some Jewish people are more likely to make good gefilte fish than others – in particular Middle Eastern Jews. As this anecdote emphasises, food is bound up with the practices and politics of racialised, ethnic and cultural identity. Moreover, the taxi driver’s invocation of his mother is a reminder that cooking is, in part, a gendered discourse and
so is bound up with the practices and politics of gender. In the UK over 2.8 million people work in the food industry (Goodman and Redclift, 1991: 27). These food producers, in different ways, negotiate, appropriate, mobilise and challenge assumptions about food’s relation to identity on a daily basis. An examination of the politics and practices produced through this relation as an everyday and commercial practice is the focus of my research.

My research explores culinary culture as a process around which identity – across a range of scales – is reproduced. I examine the relation between the narrative constructions of self and the material practice of food production for individuals involved in the production of culinary culture. Specifically my research aims:

• To examine food’s relation to identity in the commercial practice of culinary culture without limiting my analysis to one particular identity discourse.

• To identify the key narratives of British culinary culture and to understand the ways in which these are bound up with the politics and practices of identity in relation to individual food producer life stories.

• To produce a cultural account of food production and as such highlight production as a complicated, negotiated and political process that is symbolically and materially significant.

• To assess the advantages and limitations of the life story methodology in providing an empirical account of food production and in analysing identity as a contingent and situated process.

My research examines food’s relation to identity by considering the oral history life stories of 40 individuals involved in the food industry in England. It focuses on the relation between the commercial practices of food production and the life story narratives of food producers. By focusing on food producers my research examines how discourses of identity (such as ethnicity, class and gender) are reproduced by, through and against narratives of food production (such as multiculture, domesticity and
authenticity). Neither food nor identity is examined as knowable 'things' but as negotiated processes that are mutually constituted through a range of different yet related discursive practices. Life story interviews provide a means of examining food's relation to identity as shifting, provisional, nebulous, contestable and contingent. Moreover, the life story approach makes possible an analysis of food production and consumption through narrative accounts of a person's life. By interrogating the intersections of food, individual subjectivities and histories, and commercial retail practices, my research situates the subjective within the sphere of production. In so doing I assess the relation between work and home, production and consumption, narrative and practice, and their relation to discourses of identity and food in contemporary Britain.

1.2 Discourse and narrative

In discussing narrative constructions of British culinary culture it is important to distinguish between discourse and narrative. Within the terms of my research 'narrative' and 'discourse' are used specifically and purposefully. Their meanings are understood to be different and distinct but nevertheless always related. My use of the terms 'narrative' and 'discourse' attempts to account for the relation between agency and subjugation, between individuals and discursive practices. Discourse refers to the ways that knowledge is produced and made real. Discourse therefore refers to both the production of knowledge through language and representation, the ways that knowledge is institutionalised and how knowledge shapes social practices and sets new practices into play (Du Gay, 1996: 43).

In explaining the relation between discourse and narrative Sarah Chinn's description of discourse in the context of her work on sexuality is helpful:

> Discourse is like a menu in a restaurant: there may be a lot of choices, but you can only order from the menu, and you have to pay the price indicated. The menu circumscribes what choices you can make, or even consider making – if you are at a Chinese restaurant you don't think to order spaghetti. The same goes for sexuality. That is, not only do you have to inhabit a sexuality in order to understand yourself as a subject, you can't imagine not doing so in the terms set up by discourse. (Chinn, 1997: 298)

Within the terms of my research, narrative refers to the way in which a person chooses the items off the menu, how a person can arrange their own meal while working within
the confines of discourse. As I go on to detail further in my empirical chapters, food industry narratives of multiculture, domesticity and authenticity are mobilised in a range of different ways by food producers and yet these are subsumed within and produced through discourses of race, gender and class and their intersections. Chinn’s description, moreover, emphasises how discourse is produced through discursive practices (see also Hall, 1992a). In this light the narratives that I consider are understood as discursive practices that reproduce and are produced by wider identity discourses. Narrative is a means by which subject positions are experienced as part of everyday practice. A fixed distinction between discourse and narrative is false, but narrative is more rooted in the repeated practices of living. By considering the life story narratives of food producers, it is possible to assess the ways in which individuals and commercial practices are situated within/through wider discourses and the ways that these might be experienced, mobilised, negotiated and resisted through narrative.

In addition to providing a theoretical and methodological means of examining how individual food producers experience and negotiate a range of discourses in the commercial production of food, the concept of narrative implies an audience. In other words, my understanding of narrative highlights the understanding of identity as a relational and therefore contingent process as outlined by Margaret Somers (1994). Narrative allows us to account for the significance of place and time, locality and specificity in examining food’s relation to identity. In considering narrative constructions of identity and British culinary culture, the thesis therefore accounts for the individual as being constituted and constrained through discursive practices. In so doing my research examines identity by taking into account the materiality and historical density of narrative performance. More specifically, my first empirical chapter examines how narratives of multiculturalism are commodified at different times and in different ways by food producers as a means of negotiating, mobilising and resisting discourses of ethnicity and race (that are simultaneously classed and gendered). ¹ The

¹ In considering narratives of multiculture, authenticity and domesticity I highlight ethnicity, class and gender as key identity discourses of British culinary culture. I am keen to emphasise, however, my awareness that these categories are not exhaustive. As I have already outlined, I was initially interested in focusing on food’s relation to the politics and practices of ethnicity. As my empirical research progressed, however, it became clear that discourses of ethnicity were inextricably bound up with those of class and gender. Although I have chosen to focus on food’s relation to ethnicity, class and gender and their intersections, I recognise that these are inevitably inflected by other aspects of identity, including, for instance, age, disability and sexuality.
second empirical chapter concerns narratives of domesticity in the food industry and their relation to the discursive practices of gender (that are simultaneously raced and classed). The thesis then examines narratives of authenticity and how these relate to the discursive practices of Englishness and whiteness (that are simultaneously gendered and classed). Food producers, for instance, mobilise narratives of authenticity in their commercial food practices and in describing their own identity as a means of legitimizing commercial practice and explaining their relation to it. By focusing on narratives as a way that individuals 'do' identity, my thesis examines the ways in which 'Englishness', 'ethnicity' and specific class and gender positions and practices are made 'normal' and 'self-evident' through the discursive practices of culinary culture.

1.3 Why food to examine identity?

In recent years 'identity' has been central to debates in social and human sciences. As I examine in detail in later chapters, in the social sciences understandings of space as a process and practice have invigorated the category of identity — space has been (re)conceptualised as the living practice of ideology and as such is understood to be both produced by and productive of political processes. Moreover, in oral history, new understandings of memory have revitalised the category of identity as well — identity has been (re)conceptualised as the negotiation between individual and collective experience, ideology and memory. More specifically, work in oral history, cultural geography and anthropology has emphasised the everydayness of identity. Oral historians and others have explored the 'lived practice' of identity by proposing that life is itself 'storied', shaped and produced through complex and overlapping narratives. Cultural geographers and anthropologists have explored the 'lived practice' of identity through analysis of material culture and its role in shaping and producing social relations. As both narrative process and material practice, food provides a unique means of examining identity as contingent, situated and everyday.

I understand food, therefore, as narrative process as well as material object. For the purposes of my research food refers to those processes (material, symbolic, imaginative, discursive and structural) that determine food as food. This notion of food takes account of its materiality, human agency, culinary culture and narratives of food production and consumption as being mutually constituted. In considering identity, food is 'good to think with' for a number of distinct yet related reasons. First, as an everyday practice
food can be used to examine how we are individually, socially, culturally, religiously, historically and spatially located. Moreover, as David Bell and Gill Valentine demonstrate, food has meaning across a number of different scales from the body and the home, the community to the region, the nation and the world (Bell and Valentine, 1997). Consequently food can, as Valentine argues, 'locate people within particular emplotted stories or narratives of identity' and be employed 'as a way of constructing stories about themselves within the wider multiple plots of family, work, institutions, nations and so on' (Valentine, 1999: 497). Food provides individuals with a range of narrative possibilities from the personal to the collective, the private to the public and from family to community, for example.

In examining food as a socially determined and narrative process, the materiality of food is always significant. In particular, food's material resistance to definition is understood to be important. As material, food has no stable or fixed state – a cow is not the same as beef, beef is not the same as steak, and steak alters the moment it enters the mouth and moves through and beyond the body. As I detail in the next chapter, the shifting materiality of food is bound up with its effectiveness in producing personal and cultural narratives. In other words, food lends itself to a multiplicity of narratives – it can be deployed in a variety of ways with a variety of effects, it can be different things in different contexts and it can mean different things in different contexts.

Significantly food is the only object that we consume in, rather than on or outside of our bodies. Food, perhaps more than any other object, produces us as embodied selves and this brings into play questions of identity and the body, safety, health and taboo (Curtin and Heldke 1992; Douglas, 1970; Lupton, 1996). Food's materiality is understood as being theoretically significant because it confuses and threatens any distinction between inside and outside, the internal self and the external world as it is eaten, chewed, digested and excreted (Fischler, 1988). At one level, taking food into our bodies we become what we eat and so by taking in food, we take in the world (Bakhtin, 1984: 281). As Pasi Falk explains, the individual act of eating is both 'eating into one's body/self and being eaten into the community' (Falk, 1994: 20). The materiality of food therefore situates us and produces us simultaneously as individuals and social subjects.

---

2 Although other material objects such as books, films and music are consumed inside or through the body via sensory organs, they do not physically enter or chemically alter the body.
That food crosses between the outside world and inside body contributes to its role as a key boundary marker at a number of different but related scales. Social anthropologists have examined food’s role in determining and delineating cultural and social structures (Lévi-Strauss, 1964, 1970; Douglas, 1970, 1975). This work highlights that for food to be classified as edible it must be ‘good to think’ not only to eat. The edibility of food, therefore, marks the boundary between different groups and affects group cohesion through shared cultural knowledge and practice. In sociology, food has been examined as a means of assessing how social relations and structures are reflected in food consumption (see Williams et al, 1998; Tomlinson and Warde, 1993). Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, analyses patterns of consumption in France to demonstrate food’s role in reproducing class structures (1984). Others consider the role of food and food practices in structuring and ‘naturalising’ gender differences (see, for instance, Charles and Kerr, 1988; Devault 1991, Murcott, 1982,1983a,1983b). Sociologists have demonstrated food’s role in the production, maintenance and performance of ethnic identity (see Gutierrez, 1984; Kalcik 1984). In summary, a wide range of literature demonstrates the everyday role of food in (re)producing identity distinctions through boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Food, therefore, is not a reflection of pre-existing identities but rather a way identities are constructed, constituted and performed as a relational and contingent process.

Histories of specific foods and food traditions, meanwhile, highlight how food practices result from trade, travel and migration (Mennell, 1985; Mintz, 1985) and developments in agriculture, retailing and technology (Burnett, 1989; Johnston, 1977; Kurlansky,1997; Schlosser, 2001). Despite the evidence that food and food practices evolve through historical, cultural and geographical connections, the bounding together of food practices imagined as being historically, culturally and geographically distinct is a key feature of commercial culinary culture.

In exploring the commercial practice of retail category management, for instance, Phil Crang (2000) demonstrates how the connection between ethnic, national and regional identities and particular food practices is an organisational feature of the British retail sector. In analysing pizza production in Norway, Marianne Lien (2000) connects what she terms ‘imagined cuisines’ with Benedict Anderson’s description of ‘imagined
According to Anderson (1983), nationhood and national identity are produced through imaginings of collective belonging and otherness. As Lien makes clear, one way ‘we’, the nation and ‘the other’, are materially and discursively experienced and produced is through the production and consumption of ‘imagined cuisines’ (2000: 154).

In broad terms culinary culture refers to patterns among social groups with regard to what they eat. There are a wide range of cultural practices (rituals, taboos etc) associated with food, but culinary cultures are not reducible to specific ‘ethnic’ groups because boundaries of culture are more fluid and permeable. In the context of my research, the term culinary culture refers to the practices and narratives of food production and consumption and especially to the association of particular foods and food practices with distinct group identities.

In Britain food has been and continues to be both an enduring symbol of immigrants’ integration into the UK and simultaneously the sign that they are also separate from what is considered to be ‘traditionally British’. Cultural geographers have demonstrated, for instance, that the grouping of foods into supposedly distinct culinary cultures is not merely the signification of commodified difference but the way that identity differences are produced and defined by the food industry (Crang, 1994, 2000; Cook and Crang, 1996; Crang & Jackson, 2001). My research adds to work exploring how associations between particular cultures and their foods are produced by and through the commercial practices of culinary culture.

In recognising the politics at play in distinguishing people or cultures on the basis of their culinary practices, I would like to qualify my use of the term British culinary culture. In a purely practical way the term demonstrates my recognition that, broadly speaking, the UK shares similar patterns of food distribution, marketing and retailing. Many of the large-scale food retailers, manufacturers and distributors, for example, are national concerns with operations across the United Kingdom. I also want to highlight my recognition, however, that significant local and regional differences of food production exist within Britain. While it is possible, to some degree, to speak of a British food industry, it is also true that the British food industry is characterised by both considerable uniformity and specificity. Moreover, in using the term British culinary
culture I want to emphasise my recognition that this includes a range of different culinary practices, not just those stereotypically associated with ‘traditional’ Britishness. I recognise, however, that in many ways food is a way that Britain and Britishness are reworked and produced as ‘traditional’ and culturally homogenous. Moreover, as others have noted, ‘traditional’ Britishness is produced through the dominant discourses and practices of ‘Englishness’ (Bonnett, 1996; Gilroy, 1987; Morley and Robins, 2001). In other words, what is understood to be stereotypically ‘British’ is not necessarily inclusive of those ‘others’ – Scottish, Irish, British-Asians, for example – who are not white and English. Peter Jackson’s description of research conducted in North London points to the politics inherent in this process:

Although many of the respondents were British by birth and citizenship, many were denied a full sense of national belonging (or ‘cultural citizenship’) because of their plural identities, based in many cases on recent ancestry from outside England. (Jackson, 1998b: 103).

With this in mind, I was keen to ensure that my research resisted reifying the categories of ‘other’, British and English. As such I purposefully examined not only on how ‘ethnic others’ are produced through culinary culture and how this is experienced, mobilised and negotiated, but also how ethnically English producers and food practices constructed and negotiated their ethnicities as part of their commercial practices. As such I looked to Stuart Hall’s insistence that we are all ethnically located, even though in some contexts different ethnicities are less or more visible than others (Hall, 1992b). In the empirical chapters that follow I examine how narratives of ‘British’ and ‘English’ food are bound up with an imagining of national identity that is raced, classed and gendered. As such I hope to add to work examining the politics and practices of Britishness, Englishness and whiteness by demonstrating how these are made manifest in everyday social relations and material practices of culinary culture.

1.4 Geographies of food, commodity chains and material culture

At the start of this introduction I noted the material significance of food in determining its relation to identity. Here I return to thinking about food as ‘material’ to highlight how approaches to food systems and material culture have influenced the thesis. Attempts to account for food as process have been pioneered by geographers (and others) mapping and exploring food systems and material culture (Goodman and Watts, 1997). For the purposes of my research this work is important for three related reasons.
First, in different ways this work emphasises the connections and relations between food consumption and production. Second, this work highlights the connections and relation between the structure and workings of the food industry and the social relations produced through and represented by culinary culture. As Ben Fine et al (1996) highlight, contemporary food and agriculture shapes our lives in profound cultural, ideological and economic ways. Third, and most significant, I share with this work a recognition that food is produced over complex and overlapping sites.

The recognition that goods have production and consumption histories has led to increasingly textured accounts of production and consumption (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986; Gregson and Crewe, 1997). Food has been the focus of a number of studies examining how social relations are constituted by and through the production and consumption of material culture (Cook, 1995; Crang and Jackson, 2001; Gillespie, 1995). Daniel Miller's account of Coca-Cola consumption in Trinidad, for example, complicates hegemonic narratives of global commodity culture by highlighting how a product's meaning is temporally and spatially specific to particular locals and interactions (Miller, 1992). These attempts to account for food's meaning across a number of different but mutually constituting spaces (manufacturing, retail, marketing and consumption, for instance) might be described as 'commodity life stories'.

While research considering food as material culture takes account of its social and cultural significance, work on agro-food systems focuses on the economic, agricultural and mechanical processes determining contemporary food provision. Recent 'systems' focused approaches to food provision are replacing previous geographic, nutritional and economic accounts of food that have been criticised for being overly deterministic and narrowly focused (Fine et al, 1996). Rather than imposing fixed models to examine production, agriculture or nutrition, recent work has moved towards a more integrated political economy of food (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Marsden et al 2000). As with research considering the social relations of material culture, understanding food through interconnected systems highlights the relation of different sites of the food industry. Fine et al, for instance, propose a 'food system theory' examining food 'from farm to mouth' as a set of distinct activities that are structurally bound into a unified whole and related to other systems such as domestic labour, shopping and transport (1996: 31-59). The process of local and global food provision and consumption is helpfully described.
by Sarah Whatmore and Lorraine Thorne as 'hybrid' or 'nourishing' networks – complicated spatial and temporal practices (1997: 289). Moreover, recent approaches take account of the specificity of food, the significance of its materiality in shaping and determining systems of production and provision. This highlights that though the integration of production, distribution, marketing and consumption differ for every commodity, food’s physical properties - in particular its nutritional value and perishability - shape the structural relationship between the commercial world and the household (Fine & Leopold, 1993).

My research suggests that much recent work on commodity culture has left little room for human agency, subjectivity and emotion. Generally speaking, work considering food systems has focussed on what people illuminate about the politics, relationships and practices of one or more part of a commodity chain or network. Exceptions to this include Philip Lowe and Neil Ward’s (1998) account of field-level decision-making, for instance, which analyses the effect of contingent human agency on the implementation of agricultural regulation. People also feature in Ian Cook and Michelle Harrison’s mapping of hot pepper sauce (2000). Cook and Harrison’s analysis takes into account how company history narratives are mobilised at different points along the hot-pepper commodity chain by different agents. Though these examples provide exceptions, human agency and subjectivity are often absent or play a background role in much research on food systems and material culture. While recognising that the spatial and temporal practices of food provision and consumption are best examined through in-depth and textured biographies of food commodities and systems, my research argues that people should never be absent from these analyses (see Dwyer and Jackson, in press). In other words, the rigour applied to things in process should be applied to people in the process – those individuals and groups who work with, negotiate and shape material culture and food systems on a daily basis. In insisting on a biographical approach to people in understanding food and its relation to identity, my research adds to current research on food and material culture. By noting individuals as significant – not as incidental or interchangeable – and exploring their narratives in relation to wider discourses of food, culinary culture and identity, the thesis attempts to situate the individual in wider social, economic and political processes.
In examining the practices and politics of identity the significance of consumption has been widely noted (Jackson, 1999a; Miller et al, 1998). Generally speaking the majority of research considering food and identity has focused on consumption practices and spaces, particularly the home, the restaurant, large retail spaces, and consumers rather than producers (Murcott, 1983a & b, 1997; May, 1996; Valentine, 1999). While this work shares the widely held recognition that food as an everyday practice reveals how individuals are socially, spatially and temporally positioned, it is understood that food producers have a specific relationship to food because their everyday working lives are bound up with food provision, production and consumption. To date significantly less critical attention has been given to those involved with food production or the spaces of food production than consumption spaces and practices.

Two exceptions to this are Susan Kalčik’s (1984) analysis of how migrant food producers moderate and negotiate food traditions in a host country, and Phil Crang’s (1994) analysis of workplace geographies of display in a restaurant in England (also see Arreloa, 1983; Lu and Fine, 1995). Both examples draw attention to the ways that food producers negotiate the expectations of a consumer audience through embodied performances and their associations with specific foods and food practices. As Crang details:

(T)he performances required of staff are of socially embodied selves, embodiments for which they are held accountable during the interaction. Thus, in the performances of these staff and in the spaces of the stage on which they are set, paid labour is not just surrounded by but fused with a number of social relations often understood as its exclusions: communicative of understanding, performances of sexuality, gender, age and social class. (Crang, 1994: 699).

My research similarly considers how food producers are engaged in processes of negotiated identity performance in the commercial practice of food production. However, I contend that these performances cannot be separated from or explained outside of the ‘non-commercial’ elements of a person’s life. Food producers are also, inevitably, consumers and so the focus here is two fold – partly on the work associated with food within the food industry and also on the practices and narrative strategies of eating, cooking and food. By using a life story approach the thesis unsettles any easy distinctions between consumption and production, culture and economy, consumer and producer.
1.5 Food and Commercial Culture

By using a life story approach my research provides a cultural account of the food industry and therefore blurs the boundaries between production and consumption, culture and economy and producer and consumer. This approach, however, does not discount or ignore the economics, structures and mechanics of the food industry but argues that in addition people, subjectivities and social relations constitute the practices and narratives of the food industry and therefore food’s relation to identity as an everyday practice. My research adds to recent cultural accounts of production (du Gay, 1996; Grint, 2000; Jackson et al, 2000; Lash and Urry, 1994). By considering the narratives of individuals involved in food production it is noted that the food industry is a commercial site that has everyday significance (de Certeau, 1984, 1998).

The ‘renewed interest in the production of meaning at work’ (du Gay & Pryke, 2002: 2) has highlighted that ‘paid labour’ is not separate from spatially and temporally situated social relations, but is part of them, producing and performing them as a form of commodification. In exploring the embodied and embedded nature of merchant banking, for instance, Linda McDowell demonstrates how gender relations are performed and constituted in the sphere of production (1997). She argues that ‘it is crucial to connect the body, the individual and the organisation in attempting to understand the persistence of gender segregation’ (McDowell, 1997: 23). My research similarly insists on situating the body, the person and the narrative in relation to and inside commercial culinary culture. In the empirical chapters that follow I suggest that the proliferation of narratives of multiculturalism, domesticity and authenticity in the food industry and by food producers are a means by which identity relations are produced, embodied and experienced. My research also seeks to trace how the commodification of cultural difference – of gender, class and ethnicity – is bound up with people, bodies and narratives.

1.6 Thesis Outline

The thesis is organised into six chapters. The first two set out the theoretical context and methodological approach. The following three empirical chapters move through a series of related scales to consider how food is bound up with the practices and politics of identity (gender, class and race). In Chapter 4 discourses of ethnicity are explored in relation to narratives of multiculturalism involving the body, the nation and the world.
This chapter assesses food's relation to ethnicity as embodied at a number of connected scales from personal to national. In Chapter 5 narratives of domesticity provide an opportunity to examine gender politics and their embodied performances as they are located through the spaces and politics of the home and its relation to the nation. In the final empirical chapter narratives of authenticity are examined to suggest how discourses of nationhood (Britishness, Englishness and Indianness) are constituted through gendered and racialised imaginings of the body, the home and the world. The final chapter summarises the main arguments and proposes directions for future research.

Following this introduction Chapter 2 examines the theoretical framework in which this thesis is situated. The chapter is split into three related sections: theoretical understandings of identity; food and its relation to identity as process; and the narrative construction of identity.

Chapter 3 explores the methods through which food's relation to identity is assessed. I argue that the life story method not only complements but is inextricably bound up with my understanding of food and identity as mutually configuring processes. Specifically, the chapter highlights how the life story approach provides an opportunity to assess 'narrative identity' in line with the theoretical conceptualisations noted in chapter 1. This chapter also qualifies the main terms used for this thesis, describes the research process and the people interviewed and reflects upon how this process affected and determined the interpretation of the empirical material gathered.

Chapter 4 considers discourses of 'ethnicity' in the food industry. The chapter argues that these discourses are central to producing multicultural Britain as a discursive and imaginative space. As I noted earlier, the prevalence and celebration of 'ethnic' food in the UK is a means by which 'ethnic' groups are marked as 'other' from what is British. Specifically, the chapter assesses how 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' narratives of multiculturalism are mobilised by food producers through their life stories. The chapter suggests that previous accounts of food's relation to the politics of multiculturalism tend to be either celebratory or condemnatory. By focusing on food producer life stories it is possible to demonstrate how these readings fail to account for the complexity of food's relation to ethnicity at a simultaneously individual and national scale, both of which are
embodied in food producer narratives. Drawing from Arjun Appadurai’s (1986) notions of ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’ to explain commodification as a process, the chapter explores the life stories of three food producers and their descriptions of how they have mobilised, refused and negotiated the assumed connections between food and ethnicity in their commercial practices. The chapter complicates bell hooks’ (1992) analysis of the ‘commodification of otherness’ by assessing how narratives of multiculturalism are appropriated in different contexts by different food producers. Moreover, the chapter concludes by suggesting that previous accounts of food and its relation to identity politics in Britain have focused on the ‘ethnic’ food in ways that reproduce the boundaries between Britishness and ‘others’. In this analysis the relation between food and ethnicity is understood to be specific to different contexts and always related to the politics of authenticity and domesticity, class and gender, discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5 examines food and its relation to the politics and practices of gender through an analysis of food producer narratives of domesticity. The chapter begins with an overview of food’s role in producing traditional male and female identities at home and at work and the relation of these to imaginings and practices of feminised domesticity. The chapter demonstrates that narratives of domesticity are a key feature of culinary culture and argues that these narratives mediate anxieties associated with modern food production and food safety that are both to do with the body (threat to health) and the self (loss of identity). Narratives of domesticity involve nostalgic imaginings of past places, people and practices, in particular the home and its relation to the community and nation. The chapter examines the appropriation and mobilisation of narratives of domesticity in the food industry as a paradoxical practice that unsettles distinctions between home and work and production and consumption and forces us to take into account how individual subjectivities and histories are bound up with food production practices. The chapter analyses four food producer life stories to examine the different ways they draw from, mobilise and negotiate their personal experiences of food and domestic space. Each of these producers draws from different stereotypes of gender, at times working with them and at times rebelling against them in ways that can be paradoxically subversive and regulatory. Drawing from Judith Butler’s (1990, 1993) arguments about gender performativity, I suggest that narratives of domesticity potentially bring into question and unsettle ‘traditional’ gender discourses. This chapter
is focused on narratives of domesticity as a means of assessing food and discourses of
gender but it is recognised that these are inextricably bound up with narratives of
authenticity and multiculturalism and their relation to discourses of ethnicity and class
discussed in chapters 4 & 6.

Chapter 6 considers the prevalence and proliferation of narratives of authenticity in
culinary culture. Moving through a series of scales, the chapter examines how
authenticating narratives are mobilised by food producers in the production of
‘traditional’ British, ‘mainstream’ Indian and ‘fusion’ food. The chapter considers how,
as with narratives of domesticity, narratives of authenticity mediate anxieties about mass
manufacture and commodification. Moreover, the chapter relates these anxieties to
concerns about lost identity at a bodily/personal and cultural/collective scale. By
analysing the life story of a pork pie producer and a ‘champion’ of British food, the
chapter suggests that authenticating narratives are related to the practices and politics of
British ethnicity. Moreover, the chapter draws from Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) analysis of
food in France and its role in structuring class relations to suggest that authenticating
narratives can be appropriated as a form of cultural capital that performs and produces
class relations. The chapter examines how two Indian food producers mobilise
authenticating narratives of their embodied identities as part of a commercial strategy
that is both constraining and liberating. Authenticating narratives can be appropriated
from a range of positions with varying degrees of reflexivity and with a range of
practical and political outcomes. This chapter suggests, therefore, that authenticating
narratives are complex and contingent but constitutive of class structures in ways that
are raced and gendered.

My research concludes by drawing together the three empirical chapters to suggest that
there is nothing given about food’s relation to gender, ethnicity and class. The chapters
set out conventional understandings of ethnicity, authenticity, domesticity in relation to
food and use life story narratives to unsettle these understandings. My research argues
that life stories capture the messiness of ordinary lives and that this complexity is
theoretically and politically significant – it opens up a range of possibilities beyond the
limitations of conventional narratives that are more or less potentially empowering for
those involved in food industry.
Significantly although each empirical chapter focuses on a specific narrative and its relation to wider identity discourses, these are seen as being cumulative rather than separate. Each chapter, for example, demonstrates how various narratives are mobilised across a range of scales that are mutually constituting. Specifically I want to emphasise that, for instance, narratives of food and multiculturalism are inevitably related to the narratives of authenticity that construct and produce ‘traditional’ and homogenous imaginings of Britishness. Similarly, narratives of domesticity that produce idealised and nostalgic imaginings of women and the ‘home’ are intrinsic to nostalgic narratives of ‘authenticity’ that celebrate ‘traditional’ practices and, by association, ‘traditional’ social relations.

Food producer life stories demonstrate culinary culture as a contested domain where all kinds of power relations are at play, the outcomes of which are rarely predetermined. In my reading commercial culture emerges as an ambivalent and paradoxical space, a point to which I return in the conclusion. Moreover, the life story approach provides a unique means for examining food’s relation to identity as situated through and produced by a complex interweaving of the different areas of a person’s life. The life story also provides a means of examining the constitutive relation between narrative and discourse and as a means of taking account of individual agency as significant, situated, constrained and enabled.

My research contributes to work across a number of different fields including oral history (discussed in chapter 3) and cultural geography. More specifically the focus on food producers, as opposed to consumers, allows me to assess how individual subjectivities are involved with, experience and negotiate the commercial practice of food production. Secondly, by assessing food production and food producer identities as part of a whole life, I examine how food and its relation to identity is constituted by and through commercial culinary culture but also through personal, experiences, relations and histories. This approach allows me to investigate the lived politics of identity for food producers without reducing analysis to one analytical category – in other words, to account for the overlaps, and relatedness of those discourses and practices that (re)produce food’s relation to identity (class, gender and ethnicity). Finally the thesis examines the advantages and disadvantages of the life story methodology as a means of assessing food’s relation to identity as discursive and narrative practices. In sum, my
research aims to draw out the connections between different scales, narratives and discourses and thus explores food’s relation to the everyday politics of identity as relational, open, contingent and unpredictable. Moreover, by moving through a series of overlapping scales the chapters examine ethnicity, gender and class as mutually constituting categories.
CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

In understanding food and identity as mutually constituting processes my research is situated within and draws from a number of related academic projects concerning the political and cultural economy of food and the politics of identity. Food’s relation to identity is especially complicated because our experiences and understandings of both ‘food’ and ‘identity’ are contested, nebulous, shifting and provisional. I hope to demonstrate that this contingency is commercially and politically significant, enabling food producers to mobilise a range of identity discourses as an integral part of the commercial production of food. Through an analysis of food producer life stories I suggest that food industry narratives of multiculturalism, domesticity and authenticity are inextricably bound up with reproducing food’s relation to identity as an everyday occurrence. This chapter situates my research within existing theoretical frameworks explaining food and identity as processes and argues that my focus on production and producers invigorates conventional readings of food’s relation to identity. Through placing the emphasis on food producers I am examining food production as a reflexive process. This process is inextricably related to the politics of identity as made manifest across a range of scales such as the home, the community, the region, the nation and the world.

Focusing on British culinary culture via food producer life stories allows for a cultural reading of food production which transcends conventional divisions between food consumption and food production. Broadly speaking this division has meant that while sociologists, anthropologists and cultural geographers have focused on food consumption (Bell & Valentine 1997; Murcott 1983; Valentine 1999), food production has tended to be the analytical territory of economic and agricultural geography and political-science (Freidland et al, 1991; Goodman & Watts, 1997). In thinking about food and its relation to identity from the position of production, I hope to add to recent research focusing on the ways in which the cultural and economic converge (du Gay 1996; Jackson, 2002; McDowell 1997; McRobbie, 1999; Zukin, 1991, 1995).
Moreover, in using life stories as a methodological tool the specific focus is on individuals - their histories, their subjectivities and their narratives. As others have demonstrated, discourses of identity are a prevalent and significant feature of commercial culinary culture (Cook et al. 1996, 1998, 1999; James, 1996). I contend that insufficient attention has been paid to the ways that individual food producers mobilise discourses of identity as an integral part of their strategies of production. My analysis suggests that individual food producers negotiate, produce and contest these discourses through projecting their ‘selves’ as part of their commercial practices. My account of production insists therefore, on the significance of the reflexive and ‘thoughtful’ producer. While the reflexivity of consumers has been widely accounted for (Lury, 1996; Miller, 1995; Miller et al 1998; Zukin 1991) food producers have seldom been credited with such reflexivity. The failure to examine the complexities and uncertainties of food production as experienced and negotiated by individual food producers reifies divisions between production and consumption and commerce and culture rather than seeing them as mutually constituted (Jackson, 2002). One of the aims of this thesis is to argue how the commercial practices of food producers are explained, legitimised and produced by references to cultural discourses of race, gender and class.

This chapter is split into four sections that move from broad theoretical frameworks towards the specific approaches I have undertaken. The first two sections argue for the impossibility of providing fixed definitions for the central concerns of this thesis – food and identity – and instead seek to explain these in relation to a flexible theoretical framework. Citing post-structuralist explanations of identity as a political process (Anderson, 1983; Bhabha, 1990; Gupta & Fergusson 1992; Hall, 1991a, 1991b; Said, 1978;) the first section connects these broad theoretical approaches with my project’s specific focus on food producer life stories. In particular I suggest that life stories complement the conceptual approach to ‘narrative identity’ as proposed by Margaret Somers (1994). The second part of this section outlines theoretical understandings of food and its relation to identity, establishing why the recognition of food and identity as historical and geographical processes rather than given or fixed, is both theoretically and politically central to my research (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas, 1975; Fischler, 1988; Levi-Strauss, 1970).
The third section of the chapter highlights research examining the relation between consumption and identity (Miller, 1987, 1995; Miller et al, 1998, 2001; Jackson & Thrift, 1995). This work has been crucial in establishing identity as an everyday political process. In particular, the focus on consumption has demonstrated that food is key to defining and determining how identities are shaped, contested and produced as an everyday occurrence. I contend, however, that the preoccupation with food consumption has left the spaces and practices of food production relatively unexamined (with the exception of Crang, 1994; Cook, 1995; Lien 2000; Lu & Fine, 1995). Focusing on food producers, this thesis attempts to realign this theoretical tendency by drawing from recent work considering how the cultural and economic converge (du Gay 1996; du Gay & Pryke 2002; Jackson 2002; McDowell 1997) and also from work accounting for the biographical life of material culture (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986; Miller 1987, 1995;). The fourth and final section draws together these various approaches to argue for an understanding of food production as a 'thoughtful practice' and one in which the materiality of food in determining its relation to identity is always significant.

2.2 Identity as Process

In recent years the question of 'identity' has been central to debates in the social sciences and oral history. In the social sciences understandings of space as a process and practice have invigorated the category of identity - space has been (re)conceptualised as the living practice of ideology and as such is understood to be both produced by and productive of political processes (Anderson, 1983; Bhabha, 1990; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Hall, 1991a, 1991b; Massey, 1992, 1994; Said, 1978). In oral history, complex understandings of memory have invigorated the category of identity as well - memory has been (re)conceptualised as the negotiation between individual and collective experience, ideology and practice (Passerini, 1990; Portelli, 1991; Thompson, 1978). This section begins by outlining how post-structuralist readings configure identity as fluid, contested, contingent and always political. Moving from the broad to the specific, the section argues that individual life stories provide a means by which theoretical approaches to identity can be 'grounded' in everyday life. Using Margaret Somers' (1994) explanation of narrative identity, my analysis suggests that food producer life stories make possible an exploration of food and its relation to identity as contingent, relational and spatially and historically situated. My examination of the role of food in the narrative construction of identity for food producers is an attempt to account for
identity as a complex, contradictory and fluid process. Moreover, I hope to demonstrate that 'identity' must be understood as a political project and one that is inextricably experienced and shaped as a lived everyday practice (du Gay, 1996; Keith & Pile, 1993).

Geography has conventionally functioned as an organising principle and basic tenet of identity in that cultures have been mapped onto places - Indians live in India, the British live in Britain and so on. Stuart Hall notes the significance of space in the traditional articulation of identity when he describes how 'old logics' of identity guaranteed a sense of 'authenticity':

It gives us a sense of depth, out there, and in here. It is spatially organised. Much of our discourse of the inside and the outside, of the self and the other, of the individual and the society, of the subject and the object are grounded in that particular logic of identity. (Hall, 1991b: 43)

As Hall's description makes clear, 'old logics' of space and identity (and the relation between them) are understood as deriving from fixed and knowable points. Moreover, as Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson point out, the assumed relations between space and identity are a pervasive feature of accounts of contemporary multicultural societies:

Conventional accounts of ethnicity, even when used to describe cultural differences in settings where people from different regions live side by side, rely on an unproblematic link between identity and place. Although such concepts are suggestive because they endeavour to stretch the naturalized association of culture with place, they fail to interrogate this assumption in a truly fundamental manner. (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992: 7)

In other words, even discourses of multiculturalism that attempt to account for cultures as heterogeneous, are structured through essentialist assumptions relating space and identity. Configured as such, the imagined fixity of space gives way to a fixity of identity that reifies social relations. A recurring theme traced through my research involves the ways that foods come to represent particular places and associated identities. The thesis examines how these relations are reproduced, complicated and contested in the commercial practice of food production as part of the process and practices of identity at a range of different scales.

By (re)theorising space as a process rather than static entity, post-structuralist analysis has, in recent years, interrogated the assumption of an essential connection between
space and identity. For some, the challenge to conventional mappings of space and
tility derive from what Fredric Jameson (1984) refers to as the experience of ‘post-
modem hyperspace’. This post-modern experience is characterised by the acceleration
and movement of people and the refusal of cultural products to ‘stay put’. Some argue
that this has meant ‘a profound sense of a loss of territorial roots, of an erosion of the
cultural distinctiveness of place’ (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992: 9) that has consequently
highlighted the impossibility of ‘explaining’ identity in relation to space.

For others, however, the focus on post-modernity over-emphasises the fixity of past
relations/places. Doreen Massey (1992, 1994), for instance, suggests that the bounded
fixity of places and spaces is, in part, a historical and geographical fiction. Massey
argues that spaces and identities have always been more mobile and less static than
typologising anthropology suggests. For Massey spaces must by necessity be
determined and defined by being permeable, shifting and relational. She describes, for
example, home as a place entered, passed-by, left and inevitably constituted in relation
to other spaces that are not home (Massey, 1992). Static and fixed imaginings of ‘home’
are dynamic and constructed processes created by hierarchical relations with other
spaces and the movements between them. Similarly, the narratives of multiculturalism,
domesticity and authenticity that are invoked in contemporary food production involve
nostalgic recollections of the past. In some ways, therefore, contemporary food
production is constituted by and through imaginings of past places, practices and social
relations. Massey’s reconfiguring of space as constructed through and within power
relations, challenges any notion of an essential relation between space and identity.
Moreover, by insisting that spaces are permeable and interconnected, Massey challenges
the tendency to configure the current post-modern experience of identity as
fundamentally different and distinct and insists that space and therefore identity have
always been historically and geographically constituted processes (see also Davidoff &
Hall, 1987).

The politics of the constructed relation between identity and space becomes clear when
we consider how conventional readings of identity establish and reify boundaries of
‘others’ and ‘ourselves’ as ‘natural’ and inevitable. One of the most influential
explanations of the politics of identity derives from Edward Said’s description of the
‘Orient’ as an ideological and historical construct (Said, 1978). Said argues that
colonialism operated not only as a form of military rule but simultaneously as a
discourse of domination. According to Said, the 'Orient' does not exist as a fixed place
but as one located and produced in the European imagination as a result of historical and
ideological representation combining with material forces:

I have begun with the assumption that the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It
is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not there either....Therefore, as
much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and tradition of
thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and
for the West. (Said, 1978: 5)

Said’s reading of identity as constructed through complex processes and power relations
allows for critical enquiry into how ‘others’ are produced and destabilises the fixity of
‘ourselves’.

From the collective through to the individual scale, the process of identity is necessarily
bound up with the production and representation of difference. The centrality of
narratives and imaginings of ‘others’ in constructing any identity position - a sense of
‘Englishness’, for example - has only ever been constructed through the
(unacknowledged) negation of a series of Others (Gilroy, 1987; Hall, 1991b).

Contemporary British culinary culture provides compelling evidence of this. The
proliferation and popularity of ‘ethnic’ food in Britain is one way non-white Britons are
excluded from what is ‘traditionally’ British (Crang & Jackson, 2001). John May’s
description of how notions of authenticity are inextricably bound up with notions of
exoticism highlights, moreover, how seemingly incompatible positions are mutually
configured:

In important ways, then, this understanding of authenticity has become related to
constructions of the ‘exotic’. Where the exotic is positioned as a space beyond
the civilisation of the familiar and the modern notions of authenticity and
exoticism often become conflated, such that there is a need to construct a more
developed model of the unequal power relations inherent to these conflations.
Just as the ability to undertake such travel delineates an important set of class
relations (not all can afford, or even want to reclaim these ‘more authentic’ ways
of life) they also articulate a set of unequal power relations constructed across
the divisions of ethnicity and culture. (May, 1994: 25)

May’s description emphasises identity as a relational construct where relations are,
among other things, about power. As Paul du Gay notes, because an established identity
is not a homogenous point but an articulated set of relations ‘there can be no identity
without the exercise of power' (du Gay, 1996: 2). Traditional understandings of space and identity rely upon boundaries of difference as an essential category that assume a preexisting community against which the 'other' is established. Identity is therefore established by and through \textit{that which it is not} and is necessarily relational and contingent.

In his analysis of national identity as a historically and socially constituted process, Benedict Anderson suggests that identity exists less as a clear relation to territory than as a 'mental construct', a shared imaginative community:

\begin{quote}
It is \textit{imagined} because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the midst of each lives the image of their communion. (Anderson, 1983: 6)
\end{quote}

This notion of group identity as 'imagined communities' suggests one way of explaining the process by which individuals interpret the world. A person's sense of identity is based on shared cultural resources and shared collective positioning in relation to other groups, but this process is not straightforward, given or obvious. Homi Bhabha explains, for instance, that the 'representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of \textit{pre-given} ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition' (Bhabha, 1990: 2). Instead Bhabha suggests that national identity might be examined as a form of narration – socially and individually articulated, shaped and understood. The understanding of identity as a process of social relations and the practice of narration and imagination suggests that identity is a reflexive project (Giddens, 1991). This project is sustained though narratives and imaginings of the self and 'other' which are constantly revised and monitored by wider discursive and structural framings. As Anthony Giddens explains:

\begin{quote}
The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual 'supplies' about herself. A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reaction of others, but in the capacity \textit{to keep a particular narrative going}. The individual’s biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and story them into the ongoing story of the self. (Giddens, 1991: 54)
\end{quote}

Identity, therefore, can never be constituted of itself or in finality but only ever as contingent and relational.
Configured as such, identities are created and experienced as constructed and contested boundaries. These boundaries are historically, geographically and culturally spaced, articulated, imagined and experienced (Anderson, 1991; Anthias and Yuval-Davies, 1992; Bhabha 1994; Bonnett, 1996; Hall, 1991; hooks, 1992). Focusing on culinary culture as a process of identity construction rather than a predetermined cultural form provides a means of assessing how the boundaries of identity are materially and symbolically structured, narrated, experienced and understood. Food producers determine and negotiate these boundaries as daily practice. In recognising this, a key aim of my research has been to examine the relation between individual food producer identity and the wider identity discourses that are (re)produced through food industry practices.

Individual food producers are considered as reflexive and active agents but their agency is understood to be inextricably related to and determined by discourses of identity. In my research I have attempted to account for structures of power through notions of discourse, and the significance of agency through notions of narrative. To help explain my use of these terms and their relation, Giddens' (1991) description of structures as rules and resources that are simultaneously enabling and constraining is helpful. Accordingly structures work through different modalities of power including the semantic rules governing language, resources controlling domination and moral codes and sanctions concerning legitimation. Within the terms of my research discourses are structured through particular kinds of representational practices, while narrative strategies enable individuals to make sense of their lives by drawing on wider discourses.

The distinction between narrative/agency and discourse/structure is helpful because it provides a means of examining identity as simultaneously constrained and enabled, produced and producing. It is not possible, therefore to explain individual food producer narratives and practices outside of or beyond wider discursive framings. It is also not possible to account for wider discursive framings without considering their material effects – how they are contested, negotiated and reproduced through individual agency and different narrative strategies.
I outline how life stories provide a means of examining identity in such a way that recognises agency and structure, narrative and discourse, as mutually configured.

2.3 Narrative Identity and Life Stories

Arguing for the potential of narrative to think through identity, Margaret Somers draws from theoretical work in sociology and anthropology to describe how narrative has been theoretically reconfigured in recent years:

While the older interpretation of narrative was limited to that of a representational form, the new approaches define narrative and narrativity as concepts of *social epistemology* and *social ontology*. Their concepts posit that it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities. (Somers, 1994, 606)

In calling for the re-evaluation of narrative as a theoretical tool, Somers notes that conventionally narrative has been regarded as the epistemological 'other' to the social sciences. Social scientists' traditional disregard for narrative as an analytical tool may explain why to date there has been so little overlap between oral history and cultural geography.1 As Somers argues, however, concepts of narrative and narrativity draw together movements in social theory and the emergence of identity politics with the understanding of identity as a process of social construction. That there has been a similar shift in focus within the field of history from conceiving oral accounts as straightforwardly (and problematically) factual to being complex processes through which historical memory is produced, is significant (Grele, 1996; Passerini, 1990; Portelli, 1991; Thompson, 1978).

In outlining the political significance of narrativity, Somers draws attention to the limitations of conventional approaches to identity in the social sciences. She notes that research focused on identity politics has insisted that there are valid ways of knowing and defining experience different from those encapsulated by dominant theoretical discourses. But Somers wonders whether these new theories of identity are creating 'a host of new 'totalizing fictions' in which a single category of experience, say gender, will over-determine any number of cross-cutting simultaneous differences such as race and class?' (1994: 610). Somers' argues that embracing ontological narrative identity

---

1 Though see Smith and Jackson's (1999) article drawing from oral history testimony to explore notions of nationhood for Bradford Ukrainians.
provides a theoretical and methodological means of explaining identity as process rather than essence:

An energetic engagement with this new ontological narrativity provides an opportunity to infuse the study of identity formation with a relational and historical approach that avoids categorical rigidities by emphasising the embeddedness of identity in overlapping networks of relations that shift over time and space. (Somers, 1994: 607)

Narrative identity offers a new and radical model, according to Somers, because rather than conceiving social identity ‘as is’, it inevitably introduces the destabilising categories of time, space and relationality to any proposition.2

For Somers, ontological narrative accounts for the stories that social actors use to make sense of and act in their lives. Ontological narrative cannot be fixed and, like identity and self, is always in a state of ‘becoming.’ Ontological narrative thus embeds identities in temporal and spatial relations. To recognise narrative as embedded and relational is also to highlight that social actors are not free to construct narratives at will. Not only are there a limited and acceptable number of narratives available but the unequal distribution of power will determine those that are likely to dominate. Somers’ analysis of ontological narrative insists, therefore, on acknowledging the politics at play in practices of identity.

The life story approach has clear connections with Somers’ description of ontological rather than representational narrative. While early work in oral history was concerned with the validity and reliability of oral history as representation (see Lummis, 1983; Thompson, 1978), more recent work has considered how the life story is a continuation of and bound up with a multitude of other narratives that shape everyday lives. In describing the value of oral testimony in explaining the past, Alessandro Portelli argues, for instance, that ‘what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings’ (1991; 52). Life stories, therefore, are not regarded straightforwardly as representation but as a means to examine how individual oral accounts are socially and culturally constituted as part of an on going

---

2 In thinking about the potential benefits of using narrative as a means to explore identity Somers shares some key approaches and assumptions with oral history theory. It is significant, however, that although Somers calls for more inclusive and cross-disciplinary work, she does not directly draw from or reference a single example of oral history scholarship. Somers’ focus, though broad, still remains firmly within the boundaries of the social sciences and this suggests that she has not resolved, in practice, to embrace the conceptual framework that is at the heart of her argument.
explanatory and relational process. Life stories situate an individual's descriptions of events, memories, feelings and attitudes within and through the broad context of their lives and consequently can be used to examine Somers' point that identity is 'embedded'.

Though life stories necessarily focus on individuals and might be vulnerable to overstating individual agency, this tendency is counteracted because the life story approach brings to light and emphasises lived identity as situated and shaped by interweaving public and private narratives and wider discursive practices. In a sense, any tendency towards privileging individual agency or overstating the 'heroic' qualities of an individual is held in check by the detailed nature of life story that brings to light the individual as contextually, relationally and temporally situated. The strength of the life story approach, therefore, is that it socially situates the subject.

While I was interested in examining the particularity of the relation between food production and individual food producer identities, the life story methodology meant that these could be examined as deriving from complex relations, times and spaces. For example, in examining the narratives of authenticity that are a significant characteristic of British culinary culture I draw from the life story of Stephen Hallam, a Lincolnshire-born craft baker and Managing Director of Dickinson & Morris Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe in Melton Mowbray. Hallam's life story suggests that his investments in authenticating narratives are bound up, amongst other things, with gendered, raced and classed politics and performances of Britishness. Moreover, the life story approach situates Hallam's beliefs and narrative of, for instance, Britishness, in relation to or as a product of the wider narratives of Hallam's life including his home, his family and his interest in vintage cars. The life story approach examines the complexity of 'lived identity' and recognises that individuals make sense of their experiences as a result of multiple narratives. This approach, therefore, can deliver Somers' proposal to link the concepts of narrative and identity to 'generate a historically constituted approach to the theories of social action, agency and identity' (Somers, 1994: 613).

The life story approach contends that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories. Similarly, Somers insists that 'social life itself is storied' and that narrative is an
ontological condition of social life’ (1994: 614). The life story methodology provides an empirical means of examining these different stories or narratives. Moreover, in recognising that life story narratives are not original or singular accounts but may contain oft repeated anecdotes, explanations and descriptions, oral historians understand life stories to be bound up with the everyday and ongoing process of identity. According to oral historian Samuel Schrager, memory and its relation to identity is sustained though the repetition of narrative as an everyday practice:

It is a common illusion to think that.....narrators are creating their accounts for the first time in the course of the interview. In any such performance there is new and unique creation: in the combination of words, the association of ideas, the ordering of incidents, and much else besides, including, perhaps, the production of entirely new narratives. In all this the historian has a participatory role. But here, as in most circumstances of storytelling, most of what is told has been said before in a related form. (Schrager, 1998: 285)

The recognition that narrative is a feature of everyday life not only the interview process is complementary to Somers’ understanding of the ontological nature of narrative identity.

That life stories are always temporally and spatially relational is illustrated in that they seldom conform to a strict chronology and are characterised by recaps, leaps forward and references across times and spaces. Often, an event or attitude cannot be explained or described without reference to another. To ask someone to tell their life story is to ask them to explain their life as story – to arrange the events of their life into some form of narrative, however unwieldy, chaotic and contradictory. Life stories are, therefore, shaped by processes of selection and evaluation. However loosely structured a life story may appear, the anecdotes and events that feature have been selected and highlighted because they explain and connect with other episodes or narratives.

In conducting life stories with food producers, interviews have at times ranged far from the topic of food itself. But often these narrative digressions have provided narrators with an important means of situating themselves in relation to other narratives. Rosamund Grant, for instance, started a 27 hour interview, talking at length about her early educational failure as a result of a childhood illness. This episode, though not

---

1 I detail in the next chapter how the life stories were undertaken and the degree to which they followed a chronological order. As others have noted, a chronological structure is a Western convention and one that has little meaning in different contexts (see Skultans, 1998).
related ostensibly to food, situates Grant in relation to her academic family and, as later became clear, was emplotted within the narrative framework in which her attitude towards food as a tool for education is explained. Taking account of a person’s life story involves acknowledging that people act because they are guided by the relationships in which they are immersed and by the narratives through which they constitute their identities. In her description of conceptual narrativity Somers shares this view:

People’s experiences as workers, for example, are inextricably interconnected with the larger matrix of relations that shaped their lives – their regional location, the practical workings of the legal system, family patterns – as well as the particular stories (of honour, of ethnicity, of gender, of local community, of greed etc) used to account for the events happening to them. (Somers, 1994: 625)

In the instance of Grant, her decision to open a Caribbean co-operative restaurant was, by her own account, connected with and resultant from her family’s narrative highlighting the value of education, as well as with the particular politics of race and gender that characterised her social relations in Harringay, London in the '80s. This recognition of the relational and emplotted nature of personal narrative means that as researchers we may be forced to explore categories of analysis that sit outside or unsettle our conceptual framework. Life stories force us to take account of a person’s life in such a way that explicates rather than assumes or takes for granted the narratives of groups and persons.

The following section of this chapter focuses on theoretical approaches to food and its relation to identity. I recognise that food practices are bound up with the theoretical notion of ontological narrativity in that they can situate people in relation to a range of possible narratives. As Gill Valentine notes in the introduction to her research on eating in the home:

In this way it is possible to think how food practices (symbolic and material) can locate people within particular emplotted stories of narratives of identity not of their own making; and how people can also employ food as a way of constructing stories about themselves within the wider multiple plots of family, work, institutions, nation and so on. (1999: 496)

Being a food producer, therefore, involves a range of activities, narratives and relations, included but not limited to, commercial practice. Adopting a life story approach
provides an empirical means of investigating and assessing the complex, contradictory and overlapping narratives of food and their relation to identity in a food producer's life.

2.4 Food and Identity

Food is the material around which this research is structured both as theoretical enquiry and methodological endeavour. As others have noted, food reveals much about how group and individual identity is positioned and produced (Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas, 1975; Levi-Strauss, 1970; Murcott, 1983; Fischler, 1988; Lupton, 1996). Both in practice and as a symbol, food functions as a key cultural signifier of identity but this is neither straightforward nor given. Food and food practices literally and symbolically move beyond and through bodily, historical, geographical and cultural boundaries (Bell & Valentine, 1997). Food means many different things in many different contexts and is, therefore, the focus of academic enquiry from a variety of fields. As Elspeth Probyn notes, "(o)ne of the more onerous aspects of 'writing about eating' is the weight of previous studies" (Probyn, 2000: 11). This section begins by outlining those theoretical approaches to understanding food and its relation to identity that have shaped the direction of my research. Moving through a number of related scales I start by outlining the material significance of food in producing identities and then describe how food as both practice and metaphor is understood to be productive and constitutive of social identities.

2.4.1 The Materiality of Food and the Production of Boundaries

This analysis insists on the materiality of food being a significant factor in determining its relation to identity and the formation of subjectivity. At the most basic level food as organic material resists stability. Though storing, preserving or cooking methods may halt or slow processes of decomposition, the material nature of food renders it necessarily unstable. When thinking about food and its relation to identity the instability of food is significant as both practice and metaphor. In practice food ensures the physical health of bodies but it also threatens to poison the body (Douglas, 1970). The incorporation of food threatens the consumer's health and is therefore potentially dangerous, even fatal. The possibility of poisoning that is presented by the incorporation

---

4 Note that Probyn here privileges 'eating' over 'making' or producing food.
of food (Fischler, 1988; Lupton, 1996) is a crucial reason food is culturally laden with meaning and this is especially significant for food production.

As I discuss in more detail later, producing food for others' consumption, whether it be for one or a thousand, is a powerful and responsible task involving risk assessment, cultural knowledge and emotional involvement (Heldke, 1992). The cultural meanings and practices associated with food cannot be separated from the symbolic and practical potential of its materiality. In other words, the potential danger presented by food's incorporation is controlled and policed by the cultural meanings (or actual laws) associated with different food production and consumption practices. In part, the relation between food producer identities and the commercial production of foods mediates a range of anxieties raised by incorporation. In other words, through an embodied association with people, food products appear safer and more trustworthy. The anxieties mediated by connecting products with individuals are both material and symbolic. In examining the proliferation of narratives of authenticity and British culinary culture I suggest that associating pork pies with the embodied identity of craft baker Stephen Hallam, for instance, assuages concerns about 'unsafe' mass produced foods in light of BSE and foot and mouth as well as anxieties associated with mass production and the loss of 'traditional' life. Stephen Hallam symbolically serves as a seal of quality, approval and trustworthiness.

The centrality of food in determining the development of the subjective self is noted by psychoanalytic approaches to understanding identity formation for infants (Klein, 1984). Breast milk binds an infant to the mother psychologically and physically while it simultaneously enables psychological and physical separation to take place. At a fundamental level, therefore, food establishes how the self is constituted in relation to the outside world and in relation to others (Fischler, 1988). By noting the materiality of food as a liminal substance that moves beyond and through boundaries, the subjective situatedness of food's relation to identity is highlighted. Incorporation, according to Claude Fischler, is the 'action in which we send a food across the frontier between the world and the self, between 'outside' and 'inside' our body' (Fischler, 1988: 279). It is partially through eating, therefore, that we situate and are situated within and in relation to the world. On a biological and symbolic level by taking food into our bodies we 'become' what we eat.
Food confuses, therefore, any delineation between subject and object and inevitably brings into question our relationship with the object world (see Roe, 2002). Though this research does not directly address academic debates concerning the subject and object as such (see Pile & Thrift, 1995), the explanatory framework made possible by thinking through food as both object and subject, shaped and shaping, is central to this understanding of food's relation to the process of identity. As fluid and conditional, quasi-object and quasi-subject, food demonstrates boundaries as permeable, conditional and malleable which is central to this research's understanding of identity.

The theoretical recognition of food as shifting, messy and conditional is central to this research for two reasons. First, this approach to food complements my understanding outlined in the previous section of identity as a contingent and relational project. As metaphor, the instability of food – its resistance to a fixed state or to a bounded meaning – means that food can be employed as an explanatory strategy for a range of discursive positions. In other words, there is a connection between the shifting, unstable nature of food as organic material and how food slips and slides as a metaphor, reference and symbol associated with identity. The recognition of the materiality of food in functioning as a boundary marker between the body and the outside world, between the self and others and subjects and objects, is significant given the understanding of identity as relational and contingent. This research contends, therefore, that the symbolic and practical strength of food as an identity marker derives from its materiality, which enables it to move across and through bodily/cultural borders.

The second reason that the recognition of food as shifting is significant relates to the life story methodology. This approach resists privileging one meaning or function of food in a person's life. Although food was understood by me and my narrators to be structuring the research enquiry, how food was talked about or around (or in some cases avoided altogether) was different for each narrator and during each interview. In other words, the practice and meaning of life story interviews, like the practice and meanings of food, are understood to be nebulous and shifting. Life story interviews provide an opportunity

---

5 I go on to detail this in the following chapter.
to talk through a range of issues relating to food and to a person's life without necessarily privileging one element over another.

### 2.4.2 Food and the Process of Group Identity

Having established that food is symbolically and materially connected to the formation of identity, this section considers how food functions as an identity marker in practice. In the first part of this chapter I detailed how the traditional configuration of identity in relation to space has been unsettled and problematised by the post-structuralist project. The centrality of food to traditional narratives of identity and its relation to space is clear. Simply speaking, space plays a significant role in shaping food practices in that particular environments determine what foods are available either by hunting, gathering, farming, or trading (Mennell, 1985; Tannahill, 1973). In some ways food is central, therefore, to the narrative of identity as being spatially configured in that it can be understood as being the result of particular geographical contexts and the practice of the identities situated there. Particular cultural food practices are often central to the organising logic that connects identity with space. In other words, French people are associated with France, amongst other things, through the practice of consuming and producing 'French food'. Moreover, when people migrate, they are likely to continue practising food traditions they associate with home. Food is often that part of an immigrant culture adhered to when other elements such as clothing, dance and music are abandoned (Kalcik, 1984; Gabbacia, 1998). Food thus functions for those within the group and those outside as a sign of that group's identity. Food practices, therefore, are often the most obvious and resilient signifier of spatially configured identities.

In detailing food as the everyday practice of identity some of the most influential work has been conducted by anthropologists Claude Levi-Strauss (1964, 1970) and Mary Douglas (1970, 1975). They establish food as socially controlled and culturally contingent and argue that by interrogating the beliefs and practices associated in different contexts those contexts can be explained. Douglas suggests, for instance, that 'decoding' food provides a means of determining and examining a particular culture's values: 'If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed' (Douglas, 1975: 249).

---

6 Levi-Strauss is held to be accountable for the truism that food has to be good to think before it can be good to eat. In other words, foods are eaten not only because of their nutritional value but because they are associated with acceptable cultural meanings. Though Levi-Strauss is frequently cited in work about food, however, Santich has noted that Levi-Strauss used the terms 'bon à manger' and 'bon à penser' in relation to totemic animals rather than food choice (Santich, 1999). In chapter 4 of Totemism (1963) Levi-Strauss wrote that animals chosen as totems have to be 'good to think' and explained this in relation to food: 'We can understand, too, that natural species are chosen not because they are 'good to eat' but because they are 'good to think' (p.123). Although The Raw and the Cooked is frequently cited as the origin for the idea that 'food is good to think', as far as I can tell there is no direct mention of this.
Levis-Strauss and Douglas draw attention to the significance of food in determining social identity as a relational project as well as describing how the material aspects of food manifest themselves symbolically in the practices of ritual, taboo, festival, religion and beliefs about health. As Douglas notes, the cultural significance of food derives from its symbolic function in both establishing boundaries and moving through them: 'The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries' (Douglas, 1975: 249). The repeated and everyday practice of food, therefore, is a significant factor in re-ascribing/re-inscribing a complex array of identities as a boundary process at a number of different scales.

Structuralist approaches to food, however, have been critiqued for providing an insufficiently dynamic and geographically specific account of food's relation to identity:

The structuralist preoccupation with codes and deep structures is a striking example of this: not only are codes apparently depicted as static and unchanging but so, as often as not, are the patterns of social relations which they are supposed to express. (Mennell, 1985: 14)

Understanding food as a code that can reveal the meaning of a particular culture or social identity leads to a worryingly fixed notion of identity as something given and definable and, therefore, ultimately knowable. In other words, structuralist approaches to understanding food's relation to identity tend to map static meanings to food cultures and tastes that have always been subject to and defined by change (Mennell, 1985; Mintz, 1985). While particular food traditions might prevail in certain areas and with certain cultures, the longevity and survival of communities have often been determined not only through the fixity of food practices but by their flexibility and adaptability. Food and food practices, therefore, are characterised by change rather than fixity (Burnett, 1988; Burton, 1993; Driver, 1983; Johnston, 1977; Kurlansky, 1999).

Historical accounts suggest that defining any culture or identity in relation to food is problematic, therefore, because definition inevitably overstates the rigidity of past food practice and the identities associated with them. 'Fish and chips' provides a simple and illuminating example of this. While 'fish and chips' is popularly imagined as a traditional British dish and a signifier of British identity, it is a relatively recent addition to the British diet. The presence of 'fish and chips' resulted from mid-nineteenth century
Jewish migration to Britain (Priestland, 1972). The prevalence of ‘fish and chips’, meanwhile, was determined by the transport and freezing technologies of the late nineteenth century that paved the way for global food distribution (Burnett, 1989). Given that in contemporary Britain many ‘fish and chip’ shops are run by first and second generation migrants, the degree to which this ‘quintessentially’ British food is ‘traditional’ at all is brought into question. In other words, the tradition of ‘fish and chips’ is not an indication of a timeless and unchanged British identity but of the cultural, economic and technological processes that have shaped the many practices of Britishness. Histories of food, of which ‘fish and chips’ is but one example, highlight, therefore, how food and identity are mutually configured as a process and illustrate the fluid, contested and confused nature of what constitute the food practices associated with particular groups or nations. If food is a code, as Douglas suggests, it is one that is in a constant state of change.

At different scales, food functions as a key component of imagined communities, histories and geographies (Appadurai, 1988; Narayan, 1995). Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney’s comprehensive account of the symbolic significance of rice in Japan details how this basic commodity is associated with and determines constructs of national identity:

As important as rice grains are as food, rice paddies are equally if not more important as “rice as self.” Rice paddies have been a common theme portrayed in woodblock prints, paintings, and contemporary posters in travel agents’ offices to attract urbanites to “the countryside.” They are imbued with aesthetics. They have been intimately portrayed in representations of agriculture, the countryside, the seasons, and the past. As a metaphor of self, rice paddies are our ancestral land, our village, our region, and ultimately, our land, Japan. They also represent our pristine past before modernity and foreign influences contaminated it. Rice paddies then embody Japanese space and time, that is, Japanese land and history. (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993: 10)

As Ohnuki-Tierney details, food is bound up with the symbolic and material practice of identity as a historically and geographically configured process. As her account of the role of rice in Japan makes clear, memory plays a significant part in determining food’s relation to identity as an imagined and narrated process. In Britain, the recent resurgence of ‘nursery food’, or the parodic celebration of ‘70s dishes such as prawn cocktail and Black Forest Gateaux are a means by which people of a particular age and class shape the shared experience of the past as part of an ongoing process of self and national
identity construction. Moreover, a recurrent theme throughout my research has been an attempt to examine the politics at work in preoccupations with ‘traditional regional’ foods in contemporary Britain. I suggest in chapter 5 that the prevalence of authenticating narratives in British culinary culture is bound up with the narration and imagination of a historically and nostalgically located British identity (Bell, 2002).

I therefore understand food less as a pre-given reflection of identity than a means by which (a complex array) of identities are (re)produced. Examining life stories of food producers allows for an examination of this process as grounded in everyday life and takes into account how individuals negotiate, contest and experience this process. In my chapter on the politics of ‘ethnic’ food and culinary culture, for example, Alan Yau’s description of working in his parent’s Chinese take-away is an example of how his identity was ‘produced’, at certain times and in particular places, through an embodied association with ‘Chinese’ food. Yau’s subsequent restaurant ventures, their locations, spatial layout, staff organization and menus are one way that he attempts to redefine the image of Chinese food in England and challenge racist stereotypes about Chinese identity.

In summary, food plays a crucial role in determining how subject positions including ethnicity, class and gender are produced and this is always understood to be political. Because there is nothing given or fixed about food practices or preferences, these are seen as being determined over space and time as a result of complex social relations. Throughout this research I argue for an understanding of food production as a process of doing from which the material, psychological and social components of food’s relation to identity as a social and political process cannot be ignored.

2.4.3 Narratives of identity and the food industry

In acknowledging the relation between food and identity as a complicated and contested process, it is important to note that a straightforward conflation of food as evidence of identity is a significant and shaping characteristic of the food industry. It has, for example, been noted elsewhere that:

7 Simon Hopkinson’s best selling cookery book The Prawn Cocktail Years (1999) and Marguerite Patten’s 100 Years of British Food (2000) are both examples of the popularity and commerciality of invoking ‘nostalgic’ foods.
Everyday practices of commodified food provision and consumption involve the production and consumption not only of foods but of social imaginaries, which position individual dietary practices within wider discursive framings. (Cook et al, 1999: 223)

Culinary culture is a key way that a range of identity positions are imagined, constructed and produced as a discursive project. While I am keen to be sensitive to the problem of using food as a simple explanation of identity, therefore, I want to examine how food and identity are mutually constituted through the discursive practices of the food industry. To simplify greatly, the identity of one food producer I interviewed, Shezad Hussain, a Pakistani ‘Indian Food consultant’ for Marks and Spencer (M&S) is understood, in part, to be produced through and by the discursive practices of M&S buying departments that position her as ‘authentically Indian’. Though multiple discourses produce Hussain’s identity, the ‘Indian’ identity that performs its ‘authenticity’ via cooking and consultancy exists, in part, as the product of the discursive practices of M&S. Food’s relation to identity is thus understood as a social project.

By focusing on the manifestation of identity through the material practice of food we can loosen the emphasis of identity as personification - identity as an attribute of people. Phil Crang’s ethnographic study of serving in an American themed restaurant in England provides a helpful example of this where he describes how identity is imagined and constructed as a negotiated process by the performances of staff (Crang, 1994). The narratives of identity focused upon in my research, therefore, are not understood as being straightforward reflections of particular identities or practices as much as they are productive of those identities. In particular, the narratives of multiculturalism, domesticity and authenticity that play a key role in British culinary culture are inextricably bound up with wider discourses of ethnicity, gender and class that determine identity across a number of related scales.

In thinking specifically about the relation between British culinary culture and the processes and practices of identity, I am hoping to provide a cultural account of food production. As I have explained, both food and identity, and the relation between them, are understood as complicated processes that are reproduced and experienced through everyday material practices. Though my research is focused on production, recent work
considering consumption provides a means of grounding broad theoretical approaches in relation to everyday material practices. In the following section I detail approaches to consumption and production, and the relation between the two, which have shaped the direction of my research. I argue that people-centred approaches to consumption have not been matched by similar approaches to production and that this has reified conceptual divisions between production and consumption. Second I argue that ‘thing’ based analyses of production through commodity chains do not take sufficient account of people’s relation to and involvement with production practices.

2.5 Consumption and the neglect of production

Influenced by the field of cultural studies, a growing number of geographers have turned from economic to cultural models of analysis in the last ten years (Jackson & Thrift, 1995). While much of this research lies outside the scope of my thesis, work emphasising the relation between consumption and identity as a political process is helpful when thinking about the relation between food producers and food production in that it outlines how identity is shaped through material culture as an everyday practice (Miller 1987, 1995, 2001; Jackson 1999a & b). In the following section I detail approaches to consumption that have shaped the direction of my research. While the importance of consumption theory is widely acknowledged (for an overview see Jackson & Thrift, 1995), the focus on consumption has led to a theoretical divide between approaches to consumers and producers, consumption and production and the economy and culture (Gregson, 1995; Jackson, 2002). Recent cultural accounts of the commercial sphere (du Gay & Pryke, 2002; Jackson et al, 2000; Lien, 2000; McDowell, 1997), biographical approaches to commodities (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986) and commodity chain analysis linking production to consumption (Fine & Leopold, 1993), however, challenge distinctions between consumption and production. Following this I situate my research in relation to these cultural and integrated approaches to production to argue for a cultural reading of food production.

2.5.1 Consumption as a project of identity

A significant consequence of the ‘cultural turn’ in geography and across the social sciences has been a shift in focus from production to consumption (Jackson & Thrift, 1995). Part of this project has been to detail consumption as a means of identity formation. As Alan Warde notes, commodities are used to display style, status and
group identity which forms part of their identity-value (Warde, 1994). Consumption is inextricably bound up with subjectivity and emotion and is a key way that individual and social identities are produced and understood.

Broadly speaking, three key narratives emerge from work tracing the politics of consumption and its relation to identity – one pessimistic, one optimistic and one that complicates these polarities yet is still conceptually constrained by a focus on consumption. Central to traditional critiques of mass culture and consumption has been the figure of the duped consumer. In this model the consumer is entirely determined by capital - their 'needs' are created by the market and manipulated through the mass media. Configured in such a way all material culture has the status of a commodity and people who consume these commodities are alienated and passive consumers. Moreover, in these narratives, consumers are unwitting accomplices in the exploitative nature of production in that they perpetuate unseen systems of inequality:

The interweaving simulacra in daily life brings together different worlds (of commodities) in the same space and time. But it does so in such a way as to conceal almost perfectly any trace of origin, of the labour processes that produced them, or of the social relations implicated in their production. (Harvey, 1989: 300)

Although consumption may afford some pleasure, ultimately the consumer as duped victim is perceived to be subjected by and through the processes of mass consumption that ultimately serve exploitative capitalism. In this understanding of consumption's relation to identity structure dominates and agency is non-existent.

While traditional critiques depict a homogenous mass culture in which products are consumed in ways determined by their producers, Pierre Bourdieu's study of 'taste' indicates how consumption is nuanced by social class (1984). For Bourdieu, practices of consumption are determined by the politics of taste as a process of class distinction. As his extensive study of '60s France details, taste is bound up with everyday knowledge, inscribed on the body and determined through occupation and education:

Taste is the practical operator in the transmutation of things into distinct and distinctive signs. Of continuous distributions into discontinuous oppositions; it raises the differences inscribed in the physical order of bodies to the symbolic order of significant distinctions. It transforms objectively classified practices in

---

8 A position adopted by the Frankfurt school.
which a class condition signifies itself (through taste), into classifying practices, that is, into a symbolic expression of class position, by perceiving them in their mutual relations and terms of social classificatory schemes. Taste is thus the source of the system of distinctive features which cannot fail to be perceived as a distinctive lifestyle, by anyone who possesses practical knowledge of the relationships between distinctive signs and positions in the distributions – between the universe of objective properties, which is brought to light by scientific construction, and the no less objective universe of lifestyles which exists for and through ordinary experience. (Bourdieu 1984: 174-5)

In describing the process by which taste naturalises social distinctions, Bourdieu adopts the idea of 'habitus', the unconscious classificatory schemes and naturalised preferences that construct an individual's sense of taste for appropriate or legitimate cultural goods and practices. According to Bourdieu, 'habitus' mediates between material conditions and the observable practices of the social group. Taste, therefore, not only reflects but produces social distinction.

In determining the manifestation of different tastes in lifestyle and consumption, Bourdieu identifies food as a key means by which social distinction is inscribed on the body: accordingly his work on French society suggests that working class people prefer 'hearty' fare, red meat, and an abundance of food while the middle class have 'cuisine' that is characterised by restraint and concerns about health. Similarly, while the economically dominant upper-classes display their economic capital by favoring rich sauces and luxurious items such as champagne, the economically dominated upper-classes display cultural capital by showing gastronomical restraint through eating nouvelle cuisine. Later on I apply Bourdieu's insights into the relation between food, cultural capital and the production of social distinction to explore how authenticating narratives are mobilised by food producers. For the moment, however, his work is important because, despite its limitations (detailed below), it is an attempt to account for consumption and 'taste' as a complicated, socially differentiating process.

Bourdieu's work is motivated by the desire to complicate essentialised notions of taste and, therefore, social status as 'natural' by demonstrating their social construction through the everyday practices of consumption and 'habitus.' Ultimately, however, the analysis Bourdieu proposes is one in which people are statically configured in relation to social class, unable to challenge or change their social position either by adapting their consumption practices or the boundaries of taste by which they are inscribed. As
du Gay argues, using a questionnaire to understand consumer behaviour cannot account for the complexity and multiplicity of everyday practices:

By reducing the analysis of specific material domains to their place in social differentiation and domination, Bourdieu is unable to express what people actually make or do with the objects they consume, or to articulate what practices of consumption mean to those engaged in them. (du Gay, 1996: 85)

In other words, although the importance of consumption to the (re)production of social distinction is key to Bourdieu’s analysis, he cannot explain how consumer practices may subvert *a priori* social positions. Bourdieu’s discussion of working class behaviour is a good example of how his work reaffirms the pessimistic mass culture critique:

What the relation to ‘mass’ (and, *a fortiori*, ‘elite’) cultural products reproduces, reactivates and reinforces is not the monotony of the production line or office but the social relations which underlies working class experience of the worker, whereby his labour, and the product of his labour, *opus propium*, present themselves to the worker as *opus alienum*, ‘alienated labour’. (Bourdieu, 1984: 386)

According to this people are trapped in their social positions rendering Bourdieu’s reading of consumption as, implicitly at least, pessimistic.

Ultimately Bourdieu’s approach cannot account for the dialectical relation between structure and agency and this makes it conceptually impossible for him to conceive that alienated or dominated groups might act as mediators of cultural forms. Stuart Hall articulates the political problem arising from pessimistic interpretations of consumer culture:

First, if it is true that, in the twentieth century, a vast number of people *do* consume and even indeed enjoy the cultural products of our modern cultural industry, then it follows that very substantial numbers of working people must be included within the audiences of such products. Now, if the forms and relationships on which participation in this sort of commercially provided ‘culture’ depend are purely manipulative and debased, then the people who consume and enjoy them must either be themselves debased by these activities or else living in a permanent state of ‘false consciousness’. They must be ‘cultural dopes’ who can’t tell that what they are being fed is an updated form of the opium of the people. That judgement may make us feel right, decent and self-satisfied about our denunciations of the agents of mass manipulation and deception – the capitalist cultural industries: but I don’t know that it is a view that can survive for long as an adequate account of cultural relationships; and even less as a socialist perspective of the culture and nature of the working class. (Hall, 1994: 446)
Ultimately, as Hall points out, pessimistic accounts of consumer culture fail to explain the pleasures, complexities, contradictions and potential subversions at play in different forms of consumption.

In contrast to implicitly pessimistic articulations of consumer culture are the celebratory accounts of consumption and its relation to identity. Michel de Certeau's investigations into the 'practices of everyday life', for example, attempt to disrupt the mass consumption critique by focusing on consumption as a productive activity (de Certeau, 1984; de Certeau et al., 1990). De Certeau argues that meaning is produced by consumers as they make use of goods and services in everyday life:

> To a rationalised, clamorous, and spectacular production corresponds another production, called 'consumption'. The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through ways of using the products imposed by a dominant order. (de Certeau, 1984: xii-xiii)

De Certeau proposes that while production may determine some elements of consumption, this relation is not given. Indeed, that consumption exceeds the intent of production is evident from the huge amounts of money spent advertising and marketing to influence the (unpredictable) ways that people use goods. Philip Crang's account of food industry category management, for example, details how consumers' strategies of shopping, cooking and eating do not conform to the industry's attempts to organise food into specific categories associated with particular ethnicities or cooking methods (Crang, 2000).

The potential of consumption as a politically subversive practice is suggested by Dick Hebdige (1979) in research focusing on young working class males. This work examines the ways that 'subcultures' appropriate commodities and rework their intended meaning to produce 'oppositional' identities. From this perspective consumption is envisaged as an active practice – one in which the subject can enact his/her agency, a means by which individuals can take control of their own identity and, by association, wider society. As Robert Sack claims:

> Mass consumption.....is among the most important means by which we become powerful geographical agents in our day-to-day lives....As consumers, we are capable of altering these [natural, social and intellectual] environments simply by being links in the production-consumption chain. (1992: 3)
Configured in this way, the consumer has the potential means to subvert hegemonic power through their erratic or oppositional consuming behaviour.

More recently, geographical accounts of consumption have emphasised identity as an ambiguous and inconsistent process (for an overview see Miller, 2001 and Miller et al, 1998). These readings have replaced conventional polarities between pessimistic and optimistic accounts of consumption with a more complicated and dynamic account of its relation to identity. In describing their research about everyday consumption practices and identity in London, Daniel Miller et al, encompassed such an approach:

We have approached identity as multiple and contested, discursively constituted through narratives of the self, constructed in relation to socially significant others and articulated through relations with particular people, places and material goods. It follows that rather than simply inferring people's identities from the purchases they make, our main interest is in how they narrate their identities, drawing on a relatively limited repertoire of available images and representations....we are interested in the way that narrative identities are constructed by these different groups and in the different discourses on which people draw as they relate to particular types of goods in particular kinds of places. (Miller et al, 1998: 23-24)

Miller et al's ethnographic study concludes that everyday consumption practices are bound up with complex processes of identity that are constituted through and by different places and material practices.

Similarly, in understanding how the meanings and practices of consumption are shaped by the politics of place, Marie Gillespie's analysis of Punjabi youth in Southall reveals eating fast food as a means by which they establish their cultural difference from their parents while displaying their cultural cachet to their peers:

Thus participation in a 'fast-food teenage scene', in some cases, threatens parental religious rules. Young people sometimes breach these taboos in an act of defiance against their parents. Moreover, peer pressures may be exerted in order to encourage transgression, which poses a serious moral dilemma for some; while conversely, some young people's refusal to consume these foods becomes a strong statement of allegiance to their religious and cultural identity. (Gillespie, 1995: 202)

These studies demonstrate that consumption's relation to identity is not given but is always bound up with the place-based politics and practices of social identity. In these more nuanced and ambiguous readings of consumption practices, identity is explored as
a hybrid and fluid process and one that cannot be explained as produced explicitly through structure or explicitly through agency.

Although this third twist in approaches to consumption and its relation to identity resists the tendency to explain practices in binary terms, it is still constrained by the conceptual resistance to thinking through production. As Peter Jackson and Nigel Thrift (1995) note, there is a clear division between economic and cultural geography, with the latter often confined to the field of consumption and the former confined to the field of production. Although cultural work on consumption is increasingly nuanced, therefore, it implicitly reinstates binary divisions between culture and economy, consumption and production and consumers and producers. Cultural analysis inadvertently sets consumption against production. By omitting to interrogate production as thoroughly as consumption, the latter is configured as more complicated and less knowable than the former.

While a myth of the 'passive consumer' or 'active consumer' has been nuanced and complicated, the focus on consumption has inadvertently rendered the producer as a determined, alienated and deskilled worker. As du Gay succinctly puts it, '(a) routinised, impoverished world of paid work becomes the 'other' against which the 'pleasures of consumption thesis constitutes its identity' (du Gay, 1996: 88). So while consumption is understood to be a significant way that social subjects act as agents in the process of their own self-constitution, 'many studies appear to end up disconnecting consumption entirely from the forces and relations of production'(du Gay, 1996: 88). Moreover, the cultural turn in geography and the attendant attention given to consumption has been noted by Nicky Gregson (1995) to be preoccupied with ideology, representation, meaning and identity at the expense of analysis of structural social inequalities (gender, race, class, sexuality and disability, for instance) and material culture.

In providing an analysis of food production that examines social inequalities as manifested through the discursive and material practices of the food industry, my thesis draws from and adds to recent cultural accounts of the commercial sector, theories of material culture and commodity chains approaches. I will now go on to consider
approaches to commercial culture and to biographies of commodities that have shaped my approach to understanding food's relation to food production.

2.5.2 Two alternative approaches: Commercial Culture and Commodity Chains

Across a number of fields there have been attempts to surpass the theoretical division between consumption and production. Some ethnographic work, for example, has explicitly set out to analyse the interrelations between work and non-work spaces, practices and discourses (du Gay & Pryke, 2002; Jackson et al, 2000; McDowell, 1997; Zukin 1991). Du Gay's (1996) in-depth analysis of how the workforce in some sectors is conceptualised in terms of consumption, with workers encouraged to become 'entrepreneurs of the self', is a good example of this. His research explores the subject position of workers, breaking down conventional distinctions between production and consumption. Du Gay argues that discourses of the consumer and consumption are prevalent in the practices of work organisations: 'Thus, an enterprise culture is a culture of the customer, where markets subordinate producers to the preferences of individual consumers' (du Gay, 1996: 77).

Moreover, du Gay demonstrates how an external focus on the customer in consumer society is matched by internal focus on 'empowering' workers:

In reconstructing the commercial organisation around the character of the sovereign consumer, the work-based subject is also reconceptualised: the employee is re-imagined as an individual actor in search of meaning, responsibility, a sense of personal achievement and a maximised quality of life. Work is now construed as an activity through which people produce and discover a sense of personal identity. In effect, workers are encouraged to view work as consumers: work becomes an arena in which people exhibit an 'enterprising' or consuming' relationship to self, where they 'make a project of themselves', and where they develop a style of living that will maximise the worth of their existence to themselves. (du Gay, 1996: 78)

In detailing consumption and production as overlapping and mutually constituting spheres, du Gay is able to investigate Scott Lash and John Urry's assertion that 'the economy is increasingly culturally inflected' (1994: 64). Du Gay and Pryke (2002) suggest that conventional economic accounts of production act on the assumption of a determinate nature waiting to be observed. By taking a cultural approach to understanding production they suggest instead that cultural economy is performed and
enacted by the very discourses which they, in conventional accounts, are understood to cause.

Du Gay's (1996) research highlights, for instance, how work institutions internalise prevalent discourses of consumption in configuring the nature of their employees and employment. His analytical framework, however, does not consider how individual subjectivities are constructed through other discourses, practices or spaces. By contrast, because food producers are also, inevitably, food consumers the focus for this thesis is two-fold – partly on the practices and narrative strategies of 'non-work' eating and cooking and also on the work associated with food within the food industry. The self-narration of production-based identities, therefore, is bound up with the self-narration of consumption-based identities for many, although not all, food producers. In other words, narrators' explanations or justifications for work practices were often founded upon descriptions of their histories and relationships and, amongst other things, their consumption habits.

This blurring of the boundaries between work and home, production and consumption is explored in a collection of essays on female Asian entrepreneurs edited by Sallie Westwood and Parminder Bhachu (1988). In the introduction the editors note, for instance, how the spaces of the home and work are mutually configured:

The black and minority women in the pages that follow are seen to be active subjects calling upon diverse resources including their ethnic and cultural contexts, for their lives in the workplace and the home, against the state and the common sense of racist stereotypes. (Westwood & Bhachu, 1988: 2).

My research draws from and adds to these studies of work-based identities and hopes to highlight the analytical significance of personal histories, subjectivities and memory for understanding the discourses and practices that characterise the food industry.

Another approach to understanding consumption and production as inextricably related is attempted by commodity chain analysis. Since the pioneering work of Terence Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein (1986) and Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold (1993) there have been numerous attempts to map the commodity chain of a wide range of products including coffee, cut flowers, gold and home furnishings (see Jackson 2002 for an overview). Although some accounts of commodity chains might be criticised for
being overly linear, others recognise that various sites, including production, distribution, retailing, advertising and consumption, are mutually constituted and that this has an impact on the meanings associated with different goods at different times and in different places. As Leslie and Reimer explain:

> This focus on commodity chains or systems of provision examines consumption from the vantage point of one commodity and traces the reworking of meaning along different sites in the chain. Commodity chain analyses provide a means of thinking more precisely about the specific practices which shape the flow of goods. (Leslie & Reimer, 1999: 402)

Commodity chain analysis can highlight the connections between different sites, practices and people who may appear quite distant from one another. Commodity chain approaches seek to 'fill in' the distance between consumption and production by 'tracing' the social situatedness of commodities and the social relations of their production (see Harvey, 1990).9

In part commodity chain approaches realise Arjun Appadurai's (1986) analysis of the 'social life of things' and Igor Kopytoff's (1986) biographical analysis of commodity culture (1986). 'Mapping' a commodity through its 'life' reveals, according to Kopytoff, that 'things', like people, have complex biographies. The connection between the life story approach to people that I have undertaken and life story approaches to commodities is indicated in Kopytoff's description of the biographies of things:

> One may present an actual biography, or one may construct a typical biographical model from randomly assembled biographical data, as one does in the standard Life Cycle chapter in a general ethnography. A more theoretically aware biographical model is rather more demanding. It is based on a reasonable number of actual life histories. It presents the range of biographical possibilities that the society in question offers and examines the manner in which these possibilities are realised in the life stories of various categories of people. And it examines idealised biographies that are considered to be desirable models in the society and the way real-life departures from the models are perceived. As Margaret Mead remarked, one way to understand a culture is to see what sort of biography it regards as embodying a successful social career......It seems to me that we can profitably ask the same range and kinds of cultural questions to arrive at biographies of things. (Kopytoff, 1986: 66).

---

9 Chains, however, are rarely single-stranded, with clear origins and end-points and other metaphors, such as circuits, networks and webs are increasingly preferred (Leslie & Reimer 1999). Recent critiques of the commodity chain approach (e.g. Raikes et al. 2000) have urged researchers to pay more attention to issues of historical depth and coverage, the inclusion of agricultural as well as industrial products and the better handling of regulation issues.
That people and material goods have temporally and spatially shaped biographies is, on one level, self-evident but I argue that this needs to be reinstated and re-examined. Although my research is not focussed specifically on material culture as much as the biographies of people and their relation to food production, the research attempts to add to commodity chain approaches by arguing for the significance of human biographies in shaping and determining material practices of food production. In other words, I hope to demonstrate that commodity chain analyses of material culture that provide a conceptual ‘thickening’ of producer-consumer connections through noting mutually influencing, historically constituted sites and practices could be given greater texture if these were complemented by similar approaches to people. Generally speaking, people in commodity-focused research are considered in relation to what they illuminate about the politics, relationships and structures of one part of a given commodity circuit.

Although, therefore, commodities are understood as historically, spatially and relationally constituted, approaches to people are often one dimensional. Alberton Arce and Terry Marsden contend, for instance, that an ‘application of the systems approach effectively suppresses the significance of contextualised human agency – that is, people coping with the uneven nature of contemporary economic and social change’ (Arce & Marsden, 1993; 296). Emotions, subjectivity and human agency are often absent from geographical accounts of commodity chains and material culture. Given the complexity with which commodities in these studies are scrutinised, it seems ironic that approaches to people fail to take into account their emotions, subjectivities and biographies.

My analysis of food producer life stories suggests that individuals are able, with varying degrees of reflexivity, to mobilise their socially embodied selves as part of their commercial practices. In other words, at times food producers directly or vicariously associate themselves with food industry narratives as a form of self-commodification. This process, I suggest, is ultimately paradoxical in that while it promotes and ensures the commercial viability of products, it does so by associating them with practices, spaces and social imaginaries that are envisaged as being beyond the economic sphere, of being innocent of commercial concerns. My analysis suggests, therefore, that the commercial practices of food production confuse the relation between people and things and between commerce and culture.
In analysing this process I draw from Arjun Appadurai’s descriptions of the different ways that commodities accumulate value and meaning (1986). Appadurai suggests that the value and meaning of commodities can be changed through processes of ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion.’ ‘Enclaving’ refers to the removal of an object from the commercial sphere. When an object is designated as an heirloom, for instance, this is an example of ‘enclaving’ in that it has moved from a commodity state. According to Appadurai ‘enclaving’ tends to be in the interests of politically and economically privileged groups of individuals. Diversion refers to the removal of commodities from their ‘original nexus’ or normal ‘socially regulated path’ (Appadurai, 1986: 17) into a different path of commodification. As Appadurai notes, an example of diversion takes place when, for instance, army uniforms become fashion commodities. Diversion, Appadurai suggests, is frequently the recourse of the entrepreneurial individual (Appadurai, 1986: 25).

Although Appadurai’s focus on ‘things’ may appear at odds with my focus on individuals I think that the terms ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’ can help describe the process that takes place when food producers project their ‘selves’ as part of their commercial practices. It is, for instance, possible to equate the narratives of multiculturalism, domesticity and authenticity with notions of ‘enclaving’ in as much as they rely upon notions of ethnicity, gender and class as being ‘natural’ and ‘inevitable’ and therefore beyond the scope of material commerce. When food producers mobilise these narratives as part of their commercial practices they draw them into a zone of commodification and thus enact a form of ‘diversion.’ Appadurai notes that ‘the diversion of commodities from their customary paths always carries a risky and morally ambiguous aura’ (1986: 27). As my research demonstrates, appropriating and embodying narratives of multiculturalism, domesticity and authenticity from ‘enclaved’ spaces and ‘diverting’ them involves risks, contradictions and complexities and may not be as available to some as it is to others.

Moreover, I hope to demonstrate that ‘diversion’ and ‘enclaving’ can take place simultaneously. While narratives of multiculturalism, domesticity and authenticity may be said to be ‘diverted’, the point of their diversion is to disassociate commodities, some of them mass produced, from a zone of commoditization. In other words, as I detail later in the thesis, Deepak Sharma, a food buyer for M&S self-consciously performs embodied ‘authentic’ Indianness to promote himself and M&S products. In doing so
Sharma simultaneously commodifies and therefore 'diverts' his 'ethnicity' while also attempting to protect, differentiate and therefore 'enclave' M&S products from the rest of the market. Another example of simultaneous 'enclaving' and 'diversion' takes place in the promotion and protection of 'local' and 'traditional' foods. On the one hand, through association with specialist knowledges and histories these products are removed from a highly commoditized zone, and on the other their removal is designed to strengthen their commercial viability by appealing to those with cultural capital. In conclusion Appadurai's notions of 'enclaving' and 'diversion' are especially important because they emphasise that there is no 'pure' sphere outside of commerce. Moreover they provide a means of examining the complex and often contradictory ways that zones of commerce are constructed though cultural or non-commercial narratives.

More specifically, I hope to demonstrate that understanding food's relation to identity demands taking account of the social significance of food production as a 'thoughtful' practice. By thinking through food production in this way, this research suggests a theoretical and methodological approach to understanding material culture and the process of identity as mutually constituting. In the next and final section of this chapter I outline my understanding of food as a 'thoughtful practice'.

2.6 Food Production, a Thoughtful Practice

As I have noted, because identity is understood as process, in flux and relational, there is no given or inevitable relation between food and identity. Food is instead seen as a key way in which identities are produced as discursive practice. This research explores food and its relation to identity by investigating the life stories of people who work in the food industry. Despite the recognition that the discursive practices of the food industry position and produce gendered, raced and classed identities there has been little research exploring how people whose lives are economically bound up with food constitute themselves and are constituted through/within/by these framings. In exploring food and identity, therefore, this research differs from most other approaches by focusing on people whose working lives are inextricably connected with the practices and discourses of the food industry. From the start, a question raised by this research has been whether the focus on food producers is theoretically significant, and if so, how?

10 A detailed description of my definition of the food industry is outlined in the following chapter (3.3.1).
This research does not aim to make universal claims about the relation between food and identity but does insist that food production – the processes of preparing food for others’ consumption – should be attended to more closely than has generally been the case. It is argued here that understanding food and its relation to identity from the perspective of food production must draw attention to the material and symbolic significance of food and its relation to subjectivity. Food production has been described by philosopher Lisa Heldke as ‘a thoughtful practice’: a process of ‘doing’ that involves a relation between the self and the other; the roles of the community; the body in practice; and the significance of the emotional and erotic (Heldke, 1992; 216-217).

Towards the end of this section I explain and expand Heldke’s philosophical approach to food-making in relation to food producer life stories. Although the analysis in this research concerns the people and practices of the food industry, food production is conceived as being any practice in any place that involves preparing food for consumption – from making toast for breakfast to mass manufacturing pork pies. In other words, the implications of the theoretical approach undertaken for this research extend beyond the boundaries of the food industry in a way that both adds to and alters existing approaches to food as an everyday practice of identity.

Moreover, this research approaches food producers through life stories and therefore considers them not only in relation to their economic work but also in relation to biographical accounts of their lives. The research methodology provides an opportunity to explore food production while recognising that food might also be connected with other frameworks of a person’s life. In detailing the everyday practices of cooking and eating at home, for example, food producer life stories provide an opportunity to investigate home and work as overlapping and mutually constituting sites. There is no universal relation between food producers’ economic practices and their life stories, but to a greater or lesser degree food production is situated within and related to explanatory biographical frameworks. Nigella Lawson provides an obvious example because her work as a celebrity chef and cookery book writer is saturated with references to her childhood, her role as wife and mother and her post-feminist politics. A less obvious example is Stephen Hallam, craft baker for Dickinson Morris Pork Pies. Hallam’s references to his domestic life and his role as father and husband were inextricably connected to his narration of the politics and practices of his work as a craft baker. In
other words, Hallam’s belief in the importance of ‘sitting down to a family meal’ was bound up with his belief that retaining craft-skills is a means of protecting ‘traditional’ British identity and values. This thesis recognises, therefore, that food and its relation to food producer identities cannot be constrained or contained by the practices and discourses of food production alone.

This research empirically investigates the many meanings of food for individuals working in the food industry and contends that producers have a specific relation to food that is vital in understanding the role food plays in shaping identity. Deane Curtin suggests that the resistance to thinking through the materiality of food results from the dualistic hierarchies of western philosophy. In describing why food has long remained absent from philosophical enquiry Curtin suggests:

"The true self is defined in terms of the soul, which can remain identical through time, autonomous, and “independent” of the decay and dissolution of the body. ....Food, those who are defined as responsible for the growing and preparation of food, and those (bodily) aspects of the lives of all persons that inevitably concern food, are constructed as the kinds of things that are normatively inferior. (Curtin, 1992: 6)."

I suggest that the critical emphasis on food as good to ‘think’ suggests a privileging of the mind over the body – a resistance to taking seriously the physical, the emotional and the material from which food cannot be separated. Understanding food as something that is ‘done’, practised and experienced, grounds theoretical analysis in material practices. Furthermore this approach challenges conventional understandings of the relation between food and identity that have ignored the significance of food’s materiality in determining its relation to the subjective and emotional. This understanding insists on taking seriously the materiality of food in the ‘doing’ of food production. Food production as an activity is concerned with impermanent things that threaten to ‘go off’ or spoil if they are not processed correctly. The implicit risk made possible by food places producers in a symbolically and literally powerful position. Cooking for others can be understood as a gift but one that is laden with risk and meaning. I contend that the possibility of decay and poison brought about by the materiality of food is something that determines and structures the production of food as a precarious and potent practice.
I am not suggesting that consumption be ignored or that it is possible to understand food’s relation to identity without taking it into account, but instead want to argue for an approach that recognises the ‘making and doing of food’ as distinct from eating food. Heldke argues that what she terms ‘foodmaking’ is a ‘thoughtful practice’ - one that involves a complicated and significant mix of everyday/repeated action as well as mediated, conscious thought. In talking about the significance of food and the divide between subject and object Heldke argues that, ‘Preparing food encourages us to blur the separation between ourselves and our food, even as we roll up our sleeves and stick our hands in the dough’ (Heldke, 1992: 217). Heldke understands this blurring of boundaries as part of a political project, a process that can potentially replace ‘the subject/object dichotomy with a conception of relations between self and other that focuses on their interconnections...’ (Heldke, 1992: 218).

Heldke’s framework for analysing this ‘thoughtful practice’ involves, among other things, considering how food production confuses the boundary between subject and object, involves the emotional and the erotic and connects to the community. Unlike many other everyday tasks, emotion is seen as being vital to the activity of food production. Expanding Heldke’s observations I contend that the significance of emotional knowledge in the practice of food production derives from the liminal nature of food. Dispassionate objectivity, the standard for scientific enquiry, is not the ideal in food preparation. ‘Good cooking’ is determined as ‘good’ not only through ‘taste’ but because of the emotional attachment involved in the process of production. An obvious example of the centrality of emotion (and eroticism) in food and feeding is the relation between mother, child and breast. The charged nature of food production means that cooking for others is often referred to as a ‘labour of love’. One narrator, Bernice Green, told me that when she cooks for her children she ‘puts all the love I can muster in that dish so they feel it.’ It is also clear that emotion and eroticism are significant narratives of the food industry. Food producers frequently cite their ‘passion’ for particular products, processes or just food in general (see Jackson, 2002) and food is often sold or marketed as a means of showing love or luring potential sexual partners.

---

11 Though scientific approaches to food production also find appeal in that they calm the anxieties raised by this emotional process – the dangers threatened by food production.
I contend that food producers' emotional involvement with products are cited to mediate the anxieties raised by the potential dangers of eating food prepared by 'others'. In other words, when producers make claims to being 'passionate' about food or ingredients this implies that they care not only about the product at hand but about the consumer - that they care about the safety and health of the person they are feeding. This research examines how this relationship can be manipulated and mobilised commercially. Given the significance attached to the emotional involvement in foodmaking, examining producers' personal/emotional investments in food production must be important. Food producer life stories suggest that emotional investments in food production, to some degree, determine the processes of production.

Food production is also understood as a 'thoughtful practice' in that it necessarily involves an explicit or implicit relation to community. Foodmaking is always a community activity either because it connects to others via learned processes or because it is done for others – the family, the community, consumers. This relation is not necessarily positive (it can be oppressive and manipulative) but nevertheless food producers are always engaged in thoughtful practices of delineating, moving between, negotiating different communities' expectations and needs and this is thought to be fundamentally different from consumption. By conceiving food production as a 'thoughtful practice', therefore, we are forced to take account of its relation to emotion, subjectivity and community, without forgetting that it is an everyday material practice, an important form of 'doing.'

2.7 Summary
As I have detailed, theoretical approaches to identity have insisted on the significance of memory, imagination, narration and subjectivity in combination with the discursive practices of ideology. Ironically, however, attempts to understand food and its relation to identity seldom take on board the analytical possibilities and theoretical significance of thinking about this in relation to a whole life. In other words, despite the general recognition that food is crucial to identity at different (related) scales, there have been few attempts to analyse this relationship within a complex biographical framework.

This research contends that there are significant interconnections between food producers, food production and wider environments and that life stories provide an
opportunity to investigate these empirically. The theoretical understanding of the
relation between food and identity as a process is, therefore, complemented in practice
by the life story method. The life story approach refuses to ignore the significance of
subjectivity and the particularity of experience in determining how the relation between
identity and food is configured. As an investigation into food and the boundaries of
experience, memory, subjectivity, practice and discourse, this research resists
privileging one of these but instead examines them as dynamically and mutually
constituted.

This approach insists that the food industry and culinary culture cannot exist outside of
subjectivity and human experience. There is no ‘food industry’ without those
individuals who work in it and their working in it is significant: individuals change and
impact on the food industry, and the discursive practices of food production shape how
individuals imagine and narrate their own identities. This method recognises that the
relation between food and identity cannot be reduced to the level of individual choice
but is related to wider structures of social interaction. By situating analysis within and
through the context of a life, this research examines the lived politics of identity and
food as constrained and determined by the industry and the market.

Though chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus respectively on narratives of multiculturalism and
their relation to ethnicity, narratives of authenticity and their relation to class and
narratives of domesticity and their relation to gender, these are understood to be
cumulative rather than distinct. As such this thesis takes inspiration from Jackson and
Thrift’s suggestion that categories of identity be understood as mutually constituted:

Rather than thinking of identity working along separate dimensions of social
stratification (by gender and ethnicity, for example) which then combine in
various ways in particular places and at specific times, we need to explore their
mutual constitution in place and time, such that our gendered identities are
already racialised and our class identities are simultaneously gendered, and so
on. (Jackson & Thrift, 1995: 229)

The life story approach methodologically facilitates this theoretical framework by
accounting for identity as a fluid and complicated process. In other words, life stories
are understood to be complicated, contradictory and ambivalent, as are the identities that
they are used to consider. Consequently, although the chapters are thematically focused
on one or other identity discourse, some of the same food producer life stories appear in
more than one chapter. Each chapter explores different dimensions of the food producer’s identities not as mutually exclusive but as inextricably connected. It is recognised, for example, that Nigella Lawson constructs and narrates her identity by drawing from racialised, classed and gendered narratives such as the ‘Jewish mother’, femme fatale, ‘Domestic Goddess’ and educated cultural critic. Similarly, Deepak Sharma legitimises his authority as an Indian food buyer not only through his own embodied identity but by invoking his mother as an imaginative figure of idealised Indian motherliness for whom cooking and domestic work are ‘second nature’. Thinking through Sharma and Lawson’s relationship to food must take into account how gendered, classed and raced identities are mutually conflated and constituted.

Having situated my research within a broad theoretical framework – one which outlines the way in which my approach both draws from and extends others – the next chapter details the methodological approach. More specifically, by using a life story approach my methodology is inextricably linked to theoretical understandings of identity as a narrative process. The following chapter, therefore, is intended to extend this theoretical outline through specific examples drawn from my research processes.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter I outlined the theoretical approaches to identity, food and food production that have channelled my research aims. The life story method is inextricably bound up with the theoretical understanding of identity as narrative process outlined in the previous chapter. In particular the life story approach recognises that a person’s identities are constituted, produced and performed through multiple and overlapping spaces and times. By using a life story approach, therefore, I have been able to assess the relation between food, commercial practice and identity as contingent and relational. Moreover, life stories provide a means of examining the relation between the lived practice of identity and its relation to food as being inextricably bound up with wider discursive practices. In this chapter I establish the methodological context of my research and the specific details of my methodological approach.

The life story approach is a key tool of oral history practice and in recent years it has been championed by feminist scholars (Gluck, 1996; Gluck & Patai, 1991; Minister, 1991; Reinharz, 1992; Stuart, 1993), psychologists (Josselon & Leiblich, 1993; Plummer, 1995) and sociologists (Bertaux, 1981; Thompson, 1978). As Brian Roberts notes:

The rise in the interest in biography, autobiography, and the collection of life stories has been apparent during the last fifteen years or so – as witnessed by the growth of oral history and the development of narrative analysis; ‘the life’ has begun to feature as a subject for methodological texts and research discussion. (Roberts, 2002: 18)

Life story approaches aim to account for the whole of the informant’s life experience and encompass both a temporal and causal organisation of facts and events but also the value judgments used to make sense of any life experience.

More specifically, moving between the topical and the autobiographical (Gluck, 1996), the life story approach provides a means with which to consider the subjective reality of the
individual. Oral historian Alessandro Portelli argues that this constitutes a key strength of oral sources and narrative accounts:

Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did. Oral sources may not add much to what we know, for instance, of the material cost of a strike to the workers involved; but they can tell us a good deal about its psychological costs...Subjectivity is as much the business of history as are the more visible 'facts'. What informants believe is indeed a historical fact (that is, the fact that they believe it), as much as what really happened. (Portelli, 1991: 50)

The life story can thus illustrate how the subjective is immersed in and produced through issues of representation, ideology, history, identity and politics. Oral historian Luisa Passerini, for instance, argues that the value of oral history is its ability to bring to light how 'factual' accounts are constituted through subjectivity, memory and ideology:

Above all, we should not ignore that the raw material of oral history consists not just in factual statements, but is pre-eminently an expression and representation of culture, and therefore includes not only literal narrations but also the dimension of memory, ideology and subconscious desires. (Passerini, 1998; 54)

Subjectivity is thus a significant and political terrain and one that can be empirically assessed through oral history life story.

Moreover, for Sidonie Smith, narrative is a crucial theoretical tool because it highlights that there can be no unified sense of self-hood: 'subjects are situated in multiple discourses of identity and the ways in which those identities coalesce, disperse, reform, and transform one another contextually' (Smith, 1993: 395). Life story approaches bring to the fore the significance of time and space in the process of identity as an everyday practice in ways that complement current social science attempts to reconfigure identity as situated, relational and fluid rather than a fixed analytical category. Using a topical and autobiographical approach the life story recordings collected for this thesis move between and through the topic of food and food production and wider contexts. The life story approach therefore provides a methodological tool with which to examine identity as a narrative process.
In this chapter, I outline the details of my methodological approach. This chapter is split into four main sections. In the first I outline the specific research context in which this thesis was situated. The second section includes a definition of my use of the terms 'food industry' and 'food producer' and provides a detailed description of how food producers were selected and recruited for interview, where interviews took place and how they were structured. In the third section I address some of the specific issues raised by using life story methodology by citing examples from my research. I draw from recent work concerned with the politics and practices of reflexive research to consider how the particular context of my research shaped and determined the material collected and the subsequent analysis. In the final section I detail how I analysed my research material and provide a rationale for the themes selected and the resultant thesis structure.

3.2 The Research Context

As part of an ESRC CASE award this thesis was undertaken as a collaborative project between me, the British Library National Life Story Collection (BLNLSC) and the University of Sheffield Geography department. This relation is significant in both practical and theoretical terms. First, life story as methodology was a central element of the collaborative agreement between the academic (University of Sheffield Geography Department) and 'non-academic' (BLNLSC) partners. As set out in the original agreement, the interviews recorded for this project will ultimately be archived at the British Library and made accessible, in accordance with narrators' wishes, to the public. In practical terms, therefore, the nature of this research was, to some degree, shaped and directed by the stipulations of the CASE award that required a certain number of life stories be collected and deposited at the British Library.2

A key challenge presented by this CASE studentship was to negotiate between and draw together the theoretical and methodological approaches of human geography and oral history. Although the use of narrative and qualitative research methodologies have been a

---

1 The National Life Story Collection was established in 1987 to 'record first hand experiences of as wide a cross-section of present day society as possible' (NLSC brochure). The NLSC is a charity housed at the British Library.

2 This number was originally set at 60-70 but taking into account the length of my life story interviews, Dr. Rob Perks, Director of the NLSC, reduced this number to 40.
key characteristic of the cultural turn in human geography (Cook et al., 2000; Dwyer & Limb, 2001) and in social sciences more generally (Chamberlayne et al., 2000; Reissman, 1993), understandings and applications of the methodological and theoretical approaches offered by oral history remain relatively unexamined (but see Smith & Jackson, 1999). As I have detailed previously this seems ironic because current social science and oral history approaches to narrative and life story share a number of conceptual beliefs about the processes and politics of identity and, moreover, about the methodological and theoretical ramifications of using narrative as a research tool. Furthermore, the concern raised by a number of geographers working in different areas about the relative lack of historical sensitivity in geographical work (see Jackson & Thrift, 1995) may, as I outline below, be assuaged by drawing together these different fields.

In talking about biographical research and oral history in particular, one problem is the confusing number of terms used to describe different methodological and theoretical approaches. For the purposes of clarity I will outline the terms used here and the reasons these have been chosen. Biographical research is most often described as life story, life history, reminiscence, in-depth interview, autobiography, testimony or personal narrative (for a summary see Roberts, 2002). Those relating narrative accounts may be referred to as informant, narrator, oral author, teller or research subject and the person conducting research may be the interviewer, the researcher or the oral historian. For this thesis I adopt the term 'oral history' to refer to the theoretical framework that informs my methodology. I use the term 'life story' to refer to the specific methodological approach and interview structure. Given the relation between my research and the NLSC it made practical sense to describe my research interviews as oral history life stories in accordance with the NLSC terminology. Moreover, 'oral history' provides a reminder that the life being considered is historically situated. This reminder is significant because taking account of the historical specificity of narrators' accounts has been a key concern of this thesis. 'Life story', moreover, compliments the conceptual understanding of narrative identity outlined by Somers and detailed in the previous chapter. I use the term 'narrator' when referring to my interview subjects to emphasise the centrality of narrative in understanding identity and also to move away from the passivity implied by the descriptions narrator or research subject.
Using the term narrator also emphasises my recognition, explained later in this chapter, that life stories are a shared process and a co-construction. Thinking of myself as 'researcher' emphasised the exploratory nature of this work and also the attempts to draw together approaches from different fields including, but not limited to, oral history and human geography.

Given the sometimes 'secondary status of oral history within the general social sciences and a traditional neglect in methodological texts' (Roberts, 2002: 93) it is helpful to establish the understanding of oral history and life story undertaken here. Broadly speaking, oral history refers to a range of practices and approaches tenuously connected by a 'shared' methodology. Attempting to provide a pragmatic definition of oral history Don Ritchie states that:

Simply put, oral history collects spoken memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews...Tapes of the interviews are transcribed, summarised, or indexed and then placed in a library or archives. These interviews may be used for research or excerpted in a publication, radio or video documentary, museum exhibition, dramatisation, or other form of public presentation. (Ritchie, 1995: 1)

A significant difference between most interviews conducted for much social science research and oral history recordings is that the latter tend to be collected and archived for future use in libraries and museums and as part of local history societies. For the oral historian, collecting and archiving interviews may be the primary purpose of a project. For the social scientist the collection of interviews or focus group material is often only one step in a process of interpretative research. Moreover, the empirical material collected for social science research projects may remain with the researcher and may not be available to future researchers for re-interpretation.³ Although in practice many oral historians, especially those working within history departments, collect and archive interviews as part of a specific research agenda, the oral historian is usually mindful that the interviews s/he collects will provide primary, unedited sources for unspecified future audiences. The dialectic between a specific research agenda and the collecting and archiving agenda has

³ Though the ESRC now encourages researchers to make their findings available to subsequent users through its qualitative data service (http://www.qualidata.essex.ac.uk/).
been an influencing feature of this thesis. At a logistic level the CASE award and the partnership with the NLSC has influenced the number of interviews collected as part of my research. Moreover, my relation to the NLSC food project has extended beyond the parameters of my research - I have interviewed four men involved in the butchery trade for the FFSS butchers project. I have been asked to contribute to NLSC food committee meetings and have helped recruit a FFSS committee member from my narrators. This involvement with the NLSC FFSS project has had a number of effects, including making me sensitive to the broader NLSC remit within which my research is situated.

The FFSS project, as described on the NLSC’s promotional material, is an ‘expanding collection charting the revolutionary technical and social changes that have occurred within Britain’s food industry in the 20th century and beyond.’ The emphasis on providing a historical record of change in the food industry within living memory is not a primary aim of my thesis, even though it is central to the NLSC. A central concern of my research, however, has been to situate analysis of individual food producer narratives within and in relation to their biographical contexts. Roberts suggests that this is a feature of much biographical work, particularly life stories:

The analysis of life stories gives us powerful insights into how individuals reshape their sense of past, present and future and their social relations and thus respond to sociocultural and economic changes – for instance, on the important question of whether contemporary ‘individual identity’ is becoming more fragmented or has to be more consciously constructed. (Roberts, 2002: 22)

Taking account of individual histories, therefore, demands taking account of social context and to this end the historical focus of the NLSC complemented the aims of this thesis - the analysis attempts to account for the relation between personal narrative, the discourses and practices of the food industry and socio-historical change experienced by individual food producers.

More specifically, the broad approach of the NLSC FFSS project resulted in themes emerging during the interview process that shaped and altered the conceptual parameters of

---

4 This is outlined in more detail in the last section of this chapter.
6 Caroline Waldegrave.
my thesis. In particular, where I had not envisaged initially focusing on gender, situating narrators within a biographical framework brought to the fore the influence of gender in determining attitudes towards food and food production. This resulted in a chapter analysing the politics of narratives of domesticity and food production in relation to food producers' lives. Valerie Yow suggests that what she describes as the 'open door' interviewing characteristic of oral history brings to light material that is difficult to obtain through other methods, such as feelings toward particular events, and, moreover, may result in redirecting and challenging the conceptual framework of research (Yow, 1994: 10). In the case of this thesis, the dualistic nature of oral history research – as both material for an archive and for a thesis – brought to light factors that remained outside my initial conception of research.

3.3 Research Terms & Selection Criterion
Having described the specific context, I now want to define my key terms and research process.

3.3.1 Definition of the 'Food Industry'
My research was initiated as a CASE award with the working title 'Ethnic food and culinary culture'. This reflected a key aim of the NLSC to ensure that the 'ethnic' food market be included in the 'Food: from source to salespoint' project due to previous difficulty in raising funds to record the history of this growing and important aspect of British food culture. As has been recognised elsewhere, British culinary culture has changed dramatically within living memory and a feature of this has been the widespread popularity and availability of foods associated with countries (and identities) other than Britain (Cook et al, 1996; Mintel, 1996, 1997, 1998). It has also been noted that these fundamental changes in the British diet and in attitudes towards food are bound up with the politics and practices of identity in contemporary Britain (Bell, 2002; Hardyment, 1995).

In undertaking to record the life stories of food producers involved in different aspects of the ethnic food industry I was keen to avoid assuming any relation between food, food production and ethnicity. In other words, I was mindful that those who produce food...
associated with a particular culture or nation may have no relation to that cultural or geographical context. While the owner of a Chinese restaurant might be Chinese British, for instance, this relation cannot in any way be assumed. To give an example, Indian food in Britain is not produced only by Indians, but also by Bangledeshis, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Chinese, English etc. This meant that in collecting life stories with producers involved in the Indian sector of the food industry, I recorded interviews with a Pakistani British woman, an Indian British man, an English woman and a Ugandan Indian family. The initial research design, therefore, sought to unsettle the presumed relation between certain foods and ethnic identity while still attempting to account for as many different culinary cultures within the food industry as possible. In recruiting producers I focused on the food they produced rather than their cultural or ethnic background.

Moreover, although I recognise that the term ‘ethnic’ food is widely used in the food trade press, market research and the industry generally, I agree with others in noting the term’s ambiguous (and problematic) meanings (Cook et al, 1996). It is important to note here that although ‘ethnic’ food is usually taken to signify food that is ‘other’ from British or English food, in this research I wanted to avoid reifying these boundaries and instead included within my research an exploration of those involved in the production of food that might be termed ‘ethnically British or English’. Consequently I interviewed an English pork pie producer, a Jewish promoter of regional British foods and an Indian woman who manufactures, amongst other things, toad-in-the-hole for Tesco.

My definition of the British ‘food industry’ was purposefully broad. I have had experience of working in various sections of the food industry in England, including at two restaurants, ‘The Carved Angel’ and ‘Moro’, as a restaurant reviewer for London’s ‘TimeOut’ magazine and for M&S as a Product Developer. Drawing from this experience I wanted my research design to incorporate my recognition of the overlapping and mutually shaping nature of different sites of the food industry. The term ‘food industry’ therefore refers to a cross-section of sites and associated practices including those directly involved with food manufacture to those further along the commodity chain who shape the public consciousness about food through a range of different media. The life stories of food
producers from the following industries and sectors were recorded: butchery, bakery, manufacturing, trading, distribution, retailing, marketing, education, the army, publishing, journalism and television. I attempted to interview people from as many different areas of the food industry as possible, although the size and complexity of the industry meant that certain areas, such as farming and brewing were not covered.

In addition to including a broad cross section of those practices that constitute the food industry, research was carried out with food producers involved in businesses of vastly different scales and reach - from the owner of a corner shop in Nottingham to the head of Product Development for M&S, for instance. This meant taking into account the significance of the local, regional, national and global scales for different food producers, food practices and food products.

3.3.2 Definition of 'Food Producer'
The term ‘food producer’ refers to anyone who works in the food industry. This includes chefs, factory owners and restaurateurs as well as cultural intermediaries such as cookery book publishers, food celebrities and food journalists. This is a purposefully broad definition – but focuses on those whose paid work depends on an area of the food industry. This qualification is important because I am mindful that food producer could also encompass home food production and therefore would incorporate almost everyone. This is also significant because I wish to highlight my recognition that unpaid work with food, much of it carried out by women within the home, is certainly a form of work and production. Although this research focuses on paid work with food within the food industry it is recognised that the division between home and work and between consumption and production is overdrawn and oversimplified. The life story methodology

---

7 A full list of narrators, their work in the food industry, the length of their interview and their interview release form agreement can be found at the end of this chapter at 3.6.
8 Though the NLSC has recently raised the funds to collect life stories of those involved in the wine trade through a partnership with the Vintner's Company and Jackson et al have been awarded an ESRC grant for research titled 'Manufacturing Meaning along the Food Chain' and this includes plans to collect life stories of farmers that will then be deposited in the NLSC archive.
9 For an account of the significance of cultural intermediaries and culinary culture see Bell, 2002.
thus provides an opportunity to examine the food practices of work and home as overlapping and mutually constituting.

3.3.3 Selection and Recruitment Strategy

Given the enormity of the food industry and the many people working in it, a key challenge of this research was deciding which food producers to interview. One criterion was that narrators had to speak English as I speak no other language. This, inevitably, discounted a number of people. At the start of the research process I drew up a 'wish list' of narrators, not necessarily naming individuals but rather the areas of the food industry I wanted to cover. The list included, therefore, 'a person involved in manufacturing Indian food for the mainstream retail market', a 'specialist regional producer' and 'a person involved in cookery book publishing'. I then drew from my previous contacts in the food industry recruiting people who were known to me, or asked those involved in different areas of the food industry to recommend people who might be suitable (and amenable) to the project. This last strategy, fairly inevitably, meant that many of the people suggested had a high profile within the food industry. I was also keen to recruit 'unknown' food producers and those working beyond the public eye and to this end adopted 'snowballing' and cold calling strategies. I also approached certain narrators directly. In order, for instance, to recruit Mohammed Mian, a Hahlal butcher and Punjabi café owner from Southall, I enlisted the help of Deepak Sharma, another narrator. Sharma and I went into the café and approached Mian. Taking Deepak with me was important for two reasons. First Sharma was able to explain to Mian from first hand experience the life story process. Second I was concerned that by introducing myself as working for the BLNLSC I might appear to Mian as overly official and therefore be viewed with suspicion. Sharma, one of Mian's regular customers, was able to assure him that our recordings would be confidential and informal.

11 April Preston, Deepak Sharma, Joyce Molyneux and David Sillars.
12 Henrietta Green, Duncan Robertson, Jill Norman, Anne Dolemore, Perween Warsi, Shezad Hussain, Wing Yip, Alan Yau & Peter Gordon.
13 Bernice Green, Rosamund Grant, Harry Clegg, Sev Prakash, Peter & Frieda Roger, T.K. Parr and the Joshi family.
14 Jenny Linford, Stephen Hallam & Shawn Hill.
In recruiting respondents I talked in detail about the aims of the project, the life story process, the archiving procedure and the interview consent and deposit form. I emphasised that life stories attempt to situate individuals, their work, attitudes and beliefs in the wider economic, historical and social context. I also stressed that although the focus of the project was on food and the food industry, interviews would encompass many other areas such as childhood, education, family and relationships. I made a point of distinguishing between a journalistic interview and a life story, emphasising that narrators could decide what to talk about although I would, where necessary, prompt them with questions. Depending on the person, some respondents felt more comfortable knowing that I would direct the process through questions\(^{15}\) while others came to each session with a clear sense of exactly what they wanted to cover.\(^{16}\) More often, however, the recording was the result of negotiation and collaboration, as discussed below, between the narrator and me.

I outlined the time commitment involved in recording a life story and stressed that recordings could take place at the location and time that best suited them, including evenings or weekends. Having verbally explained the process I then sent every narrator a NLSC information pack and a description of the 'Ethnic Food and Culinary Culture' project.\(^{17}\) A few days after sending this information I contacted potential respondents, asked if they were still happy to record their life story, answered any further questions and then arranged a time to begin recording.

The recruitment failure rate was unusually low\(^{18}\) compared with many research projects for two main reasons. First, I was able to use my food industry contacts by either asking friends to speak to potential narrators on my behalf\(^{19}\) or mentioning their names when I made new

\(^{15}\) Caroline Waldegrave, Joyce Molyneux & Elaine Hallgarten for instance.

\(^{16}\) Phillip Button, John Brewster and Duncan Robertson for instance.

\(^{17}\) See appendix

\(^{18}\) I approached Namita Punjabi, Director of the Taj Group twice by letter and did not receive any reply. I also approached an account manager of Tazaki Foods, the largest importer of Japanese foods to the UK. Although he would not agree to be interviewed he did assist me in recruiting Wing Yip and Alan Yau.

\(^{19}\) My access to Perween Warsi was facilitated and made possible by April Preston, a Senior Product Developer from M&S. I feel fairly sure that Warsi agreed to be interviewed because she was keen to gain M&S business. At the end of our first interview she asked me to let April know she was trying to contact her about a new range. Warsi's motivation for being recorded, therefore, was complicated. Significantly she is the only narrator who has failed, thus far, to sign an interview release form and this, for the time being, necessitates my thesis being closed.
approaches. Second, when I approached people I did so under the remit of the BLNLSC. When I spoke to people on the telephone I said I was calling from ‘the British Library National Life Story Collection’ and the letters I wrote to informants were on BLNLSC ‘Food: from Source to Salespoint’ headed paper on which my name and title (‘researcher’) were printed. The relation with the BLNLSC set the research within the context of a professional and respected institution. Potential respondents were informed that their life story would form part of a larger collection archived at the British Library. As I discuss below, being asked to be recorded was flattering and appealed to some respondents’ sense of history.

Although some oral historians suggest pre-interviewing potential respondents to ascertain whether they will make ‘good’ life story narrators,20 I purposefully did not adopt this approach. Determining what constitutes a ‘good’ life story narrator is highly problematic. As I detail below, feminist oral historians have argued that privileging those who are used to public speaking and are ‘natural’ raconteurs excludes many women and cultural ‘others’ who are less used to public speaking or speaking as a single narrator (Minister, 1991). Although, therefore, the political agenda of much oral history work is to account for the ‘hidden histories’ of those without power, some of the conventions of oral history life story may inadvertantly serve to marginalise or exclude the individuals and groups they seek to embrace. Food producers were recruited for this research because of their work in the industry, not because of their narrative style or personality.

3.3.4 Interview Location and Timings

As stated, narrators could choose where and when they wanted their life story recorded. In terms of timing this meant my diary had to be flexible. Some narrators were only available in the evenings or weekends. Some could only see me for an hour at a time, meaning I had to make multiple visits to complete a life story. Others agreed to ‘give me’ a day to record their entire life story. While some life story recordings were completed in a day,21 therefore,

---

20 Oral historians Steve Hussey, Paul Thompson and Hugo Manson who are known to me through my work with the Oral History Society all advocate ‘pre-interviewing’ potential narrators.
21 T.K.Parr, the Joshi family, Frieda Roger & Peter Roger.
most took months and a few took over a year to complete. Although the least time consuming or involved, I found the day-long life story interview process the most difficult because it provided no opportunity to reflect upon, qualify or question the life story as it evolved. By contrast, in the weeks or months while most life stories were in progress I was able to listen to the recordings between each meeting, reflect upon these in the interview diary I kept and then follow up any relevant areas in the subsequent session.

The location of the interview was decided by the narrator. Recordings took place at a number of different places including an interview room at the British Library, the narrator's home or place of work or, on a few occasions, at my home. Each of these locations had advantages and disadvantages and impacted on the recording process and the relation between the narrator and me. Generally speaking the British Library provided the most formal and least intimate space for a recording to take place and one in which the relation with the BLNLSC was fore-grounded. In a number of cases narrators came to the BL for their first interview and then, once they had met me and felt more confident about the process, invited me to their place of work or their home. Recording in food producers' work-spaces was helpful because it enabled me to understand some of the practices and relations of their work. A disadvantage of recording at a person's workplace was that interviews were more subject to interruptions and to be cut short when narrators were suddenly called away to meetings. There were clear advantages to recording in narrators' homes in that it allowed me to meet other family members, I was invited to share meals and drinks and was able to situate the narrator within their social and familial context.

Moreover, the home setting often gave me access to the narrator's kitchen where I was sometimes able to take photographs and explore. Talking to narrators about the contents of their fridge, for example, proved a good way of getting them to describe food practices and consumption in the home. Generally interviews within the home took place in the living

---

22 Rosamund Grant, Shaun Hill, Claudia Roden & Alan Yau.
23 Caroline Waldegrave, Jill Norman & Claudia Roden.
24 Duncan Robertson gave me a tour of the Army Catering Corps. kitchens and the Officers' Mess at Aldershot training camp. Stephen Hallam showed me the public and private areas of the Dickinson & Moriss Olde Pork Pie Shoppe as well as Samworth Brothers Head office and the pork pie production unit, Bradgate factory, in Leicester. Mohammed Mian was interviewed in an empty room above his Punjab cafe. Over the period of time Perween Warsi was interviewed, her office at S&A Foods was being refurbished and although I did not see the production facility (due to issues of production confidentiality and my previous connection with M&S) I was shown around the new offices, test kitchens and tasting rooms.
room but when recording the Joshi family I recorded in a bedroom and when recording Rosamund Grant we sat in the room she used for her psycho-analytic practice. This is significant because it highlights how different spaces within the home have different associations and meanings and these inevitably shaped the nature of the recordings. Grant told me, for instance, that her therapy room was a place where she felt safe to explore difficult areas, a place where 'anything goes.' She said that if we had recorded in her living room she would have felt more constrained and formal and, significantly, more mindful of her family. As with recording in the work place, recording in the home was subject to interruptions from other family members, the telephone and neighbours. In summary the locations and timings where interviews were conducted were significant factors in shaping the final life story recording.

3.3.5 The Interview Process

Although each life story is necessarily individual and therefore the interview process varied, there were a number of set procedures, intended to guide narrators and provide a degree of continuity between different recordings, that I maintained from case to case. Before starting recording, for instance, I told narrators that I would ask questions but would not interrupt or contradict them while they were speaking. If they wanted to repeat, retract or qualify something I let them know this was fine but that I would not edit or erase what we recorded except in exceptional circumstances. I also encouraged narrators to ask for qualifications and explanations from me if they did not understand a question or the motivation behind a question. This was intended to elicit as open a recording as possible and one in which the narrator felt comfortable rather than under scrutiny or attack.

Moreover, I also explained to narrators that at times I would have to glance at the recording equipment to make sure it was working but that this did not mean I was not listening to

---

25 Only one narrator, Claudia Roden, has asked me to erase a section of her interview. Roden felt on reflection that this section of her life story betrayed a close member of her family. I was reluctant to edit the tapes, hoping that Roden would agree to leave them if the tapes remained closed for a long time. In the event Roden, a veteran of the media, did not trust this procedure and insisted on my erasing the relevant sections. She did, however, agree to talk on tape about why aspects of her tapes had been edited so that future researchers will be clear about the gap in her recordings.

26 In accordance with the practices of the NLSC I used an analogue Marantz tape recorder and TDK 60 minute tapes to make all my recordings.
them and, if possible, they should continue speaking. At the start of every recording session
I began by recording the date, time and place of the interview and mine and the narrator’s
full names. Starting chronologically, I asked narrators about their time and place of birth
and then would start to ask about their parents, family and earliest childhood memories.
From this point the recordings tended to spiral outwards encompassing the events and
associated feelings that characterised a narrator’s life. I tried, as far as possible, to let
narrators talk freely by asking open ended questions but would also direct questions
towards the role of food or memories of food in their home or work life. When recording I
was directed by what I term a triple agenda. This included an ethical concern about the
narrator and their comfort towards the life story process and the final recording. It also
included an awareness of the wider context of the BLNLSC and the future audience who
might listen to any recordings collected. The impetus for many questions I asked was not
my own research agenda but the supposition of questions that future researchers might want
to know. When interviewing I tried to consider, therefore, what information a biographer of
the narrator would need to write his/her biography and what context might require detailed
description. For instance, when asking David Sillars about sushi manufacture in his
Sheffield factory, although I was familiar with the process from having been a Sushi
Product Developer for M&S, I asked him to describe it in detail. I did this so that I would
have an account of the process in Sillars’ words, and also so that it was available to future
researchers. The third agenda that shaped my questions was my research. This evolved and
altered over time as different life stories and narrators were recorded but involved
examining specific production practices and producer attitudes and feelings about them.
This multiple agenda demanded a degree of juggling but also meant that my initial research
assumptions did not limit the findings. Towards the end of each life story recording I asked
narrators to reflect upon the process and to add anything they felt was missed out. This
provided narrators with an opportunity to make public any feelings or problems they felt
about the life story interview generally and their recording specifically.

By not predetermining the ‘types’ of narrator I wanted to interview I had to adopt an
extremely flexible and case by case approach to life story recording. Most food producer
recordings collected for this research fall within a similar category - they are chronological,
thematic and have a clear beginning and end. A few, however, do not conform to this pattern but should not be discounted because of this. The interview with the Joshi family, for instance, stands out as being exceptional. I initially went to interview Jay Joshi in Leicester about his involvement with his family’s Indian bakery and sweet shop. On arrival at the shop, I was introduced to his three brothers and it soon became apparent that they all expected to be recorded. It was decided that the family home, about a mile from the shop, was the most suitable place for recording. At the home where all the family live I was also introduced to the brothers’ four wives, seven children and mother and father, both of whom also wanted to be interviewed. Rather than offend any of the family by refusing to interview them I decided to record an hour with each of the six family members who expected to be recorded. The recordings were conducted in one of the brother’s bedrooms with children running around and wives bringing us tea and snacks. For each of the family I attempted to focus on one particular element of the family’s history. I asked the father to talk about the migration from Uganda to England in the 1970s. The eldest son focused on his early memories of England and his parents’ absence from the family home due to work. Another son described how the family saved to purchase the family business and how he would return from school, help in the shop and sleep on the floor until his parents were ready to go home. Another described the business today, the products sold, where they are made and described the shop’s customers. The mother talked about testing all the new products sold in the shop and how she oversees the wedding catering business the family runs. Moreover, although the brothers’ wives would not allow me to record them because they felt their English was not good enough, I spent the evening with them watching them cook for their families and sharing their food. Two of the wives told me they had never previously spoken to a white English woman. In isolation and without an explanation of their context, these recordings might seem incomplete and chaotic but I think they depict a historically, geographically specific and significant story of a British Indian family. Moreover, in having a flexible and open approach to interviewing I was privileged to have access to the private sphere of an Indian family, invited to share their food and exchange information about our different worlds.
3.3.6 Confidentiality and the Copyright Agreement.

On completing a life story I made a copy and accessioned every tape in accordance with NLSC archiving procedure. The accessioned original was then sent off and stored in the BL and I kept the accessioned copy for use during the thesis writing process. Narrators were assured of the confidentiality of their recordings and of information they passed to me ‘off record.’ The narrators were aware (and often agreed to be recorded on the basis) that their recordings would be deposited and archived at the BL as part of the NLSC. On completing their life story recording narrators were asked to sign an interview release form that passes the copyright for the interview from them to the BLNLSC. It is possible for recordings to be embargoed for any time up to 30 years if a narrator wishes. The promise of confidentiality facilitates narrators’ trust and can result in highly sensitive and private information being recorded as part of a life story.

In part, however, there was a conflict of interest between the thesis research process, the promise of confidentiality and the embargo permitted by the interview release form. I did inform each narrator that their life stories might be used as part of a PhD thesis and sought their verbal permission for this. I also promised that if my thesis were made public I would contact them and inform them of the extracts taken from their recordings. This procedure has meant that in two instances I have removed a sentence from an interviewee’s transcript appearing in the thesis at an interviewee’s request. Because of the topic of my thesis I have not used extracts that are particularly exposing of intimate relations so I feel less conflicted about the extracts themselves than the relation between my narrators’ accounts and my analysis. I discuss this relation in more detail in the following section.

3.4 Reflexive Research

Before describing the particular processes I undertook in analysing my empirical material, it is important to emphasise a number of issues raised by the life story methodology that inevitably impact upon the research findings. In particular, a significant result of the narrative, biographical and autobiographical turn in the social sciences has been to bring to light questions of reflexivity and positionality. A similar shift in focus has occurred within human geography, as documented by Gillian Rose (Rose, 1997; see also Cook et al, 2000). Reflexivity refers to analytical strategies for situating knowledge as a means of avoiding
false neutrality and universality. The concern with reflexivity and positionality has resulted in a re-evaluation of the researcher and the research processes, and the relation of these to the material and analysis generated. According to Rosanna Hertz, 'reflexivity implies a shift in understanding of data and its collection – accomplished through detachment, internal dialogue and constant and intensive scrutiny of ‘what I know’ and ‘how I know it’ (Hertz, 1997: viii).

Attempting to situate and examine the politics of food production and identity for food producers by analysing life stories has meant being mindful of the context in which the life stories were collected. Drawing from work analysing reflexive approaches to interviewing, I want to highlight aspects of life stories with food producers that have shaped and determined the material collected and analysis conducted for this research. As part of this I will draw on specific examples from my research to add to debates about methodological approaches and the possibilities and limitations of reflexivity.²⁷

Feminist researchers in particular have pioneered approaches to reflexive interviewing, arguing that it is inextricably bound up with the feminist political agenda. Helen Callaway argues that reflexivity forces the researcher to scrutinise the political dimensions of any research:

> Often condemned as apolitical, reflexivity, on the contrary can be seen as opening the way to a more radical consciousness of self in facing the political dimensions of fieldwork and constructing knowledge. Other factors intersecting with gender – such as nationality, race, ethnicity, class and age – also affect the anthropologist’s field interactions and textual strategies. Reflexivity becomes a continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness. (Callaway, 1992: 33)

Reflexivity, therefore, challenges the researcher to be more conscious of the ideology, culture and politics of the people they study, as well as of themselves. This process complicates the boundary between research and researcher, rendering problematic the notion of the objective and disinterested researcher.

²⁷ For work contesting and scrutinising the notion of reflexive research see Pels (2000) and Lynch (2000).
Rosanna Hertz suggests that reflexive social science leads to reflexive knowledge – an understanding of how knowledge comes about. The contexts in which research findings are generated, therefore, are understood as being inextricably bound up with the research findings themselves. Writing specifically about oral history, Portelli argues that the documents of oral history are always the result of a relationship, of a shared project in which both the interviewer and the narrator are involved together, if not necessarily in harmony (Portelli, 1991: 56). Reflexive life story interviewing attempts to account for this relationship and its impact on the material collected. Kristina Minister (1991) suggests, for instance, that interviewers position themselves within the narrative and allow for dialogic relationships with the subjects of their research. By bringing researcher and researched into the same space, reflexive research provides audiences with an opportunity to evaluate them as situated actors, participants in the process of creating meaning. Reflexive research, therefore, is ubiquitous and brings to the fore the politics of representation and those things (conversations, meals and introductions to other family members, for example) that take place outside the interview itself.

If it is clear that life stories are a form of dialogue and negotiation, it follows that the researcher’s agenda, personality and politics will implicitly and explicitly shape the recordings. By situating themselves as integral to the research process, researchers can actively question how their interpretations and analysis come into being. Reflexive research challenges the notion of a removed, uninvolved researcher and therefore demands that the researcher assess their impact on the research process.

In Hertz’s description researchers, as ‘situated actors’, bring to each interview their own histories - to make sense of what they hear and experience, researchers draw on their experience. Hertz suggests that:

Since researchers are acknowledged as active participants in the research process, it is essential to understand the researcher’s location of self (e.g. within power hierarchies and within a constellation of gender, race, class, and citizenship...). (Hertz, 1997: viii)

The attempt to situate the researcher’s ‘self’ and to assess its impact on the research process is an ideal that will always be in a process of realisation. While it is possible for a
researcher to declare how aspects of their ‘self’ might be located (in terms of race, gender, class etc) no account of the ‘self’ - if identity is understood as a relational, on-going and dynamic process - can be definitive. Acknowledging that I am white, female, heterosexual and middle-class and that these categories will inevitably shape my relation to others and the interaction between us, is not the same as being able to qualify with any degree of fixity these categories and their effects as inevitable. Even though it is possible, therefore, to speculate and reflect upon how the researcher’s ‘classed’, ‘raced’ and ‘gendered’ self relate to the power relations inherent in any research process - how it affected individual narrator’s accounts and determined the particular focus of the research aims and analysis – these should be understood in relation to the specific context and relations of the research process. In other words, the effects of my being middle class, for example, will not have the same impact and effect on every interview scenario. Moreover, in privileging race, class and gender (or any other identity category), as significant, we may overstate one categories at the expense of others. I interviewed, for instance, four men involved in the butchery trade and at the start of the interview process each asked whether I was a vegetarian. For them, my attitudes towards meat were probably equally if not more significant than my class, ethnicity or gender.

Reflexive research does not assume any particular relation is inevitable but will interrogate the processes by which material is generated and analysed. In recording the life stories of food producers I endeavoured to maintain an interview diary throughout the interview process. This diary served a number of functions. On a practical level I used it to write down areas of inquiry that were raised but not followed up in any given session in order to return to them in the next. Mostly, however, the interview diary was where I reflected upon my feelings towards the interview process and my relation to the narrator. Given that this relation developed over a long period of time, the diary has been a means of charting how the research material has been generated as part of an ongoing process. The research diary was where I noted, as fully as possible, those things that took place outside the recording process. This included, amongst other things, being shown family photographs, chatting while making tea, introductions to other family members and, on occasion, entire meals. Moreover the interview diary was where I was able to record stories that narrators felt were
too 'racy' or compromising to record on tape. Because these stories were told in confidence, often as a verbal gift implying trust and friendship, I did not use them directly in my analysis. But these 'off-the-record' accounts are important because they bring into question the degree to which the life story recording is a form of performance and a particular version, of which there could be different versions, of a person's life story.

In recognising that the narrator telling a life story is staging a performance that involves negotiating and engaging with a host of expectations and conventions, it is important to recognise that the same is true for the researcher. In being reflexive the researcher will need to be flexible, willing to adapt to the research process from moment to moment. In other words the researcher will engage in a form of performance to elicit the best information from the narrator. A clash of identities between the researcher and narrator might result in information being withheld so interviewers strive to reconcile personal differences and find common ground with respondents. Minister describes this process in the following ways:

Experienced oral historians will be aware of such differences because they do not attempt interviews until they have studied the social and historical contexts of narrators' lives, and thus they learn subtly to adapt their worn linguistic performance to narrators' linguistic performance. Some sensitive field-workers adjust differences between themselves and narrators nonverbally - for example, by matching apparel and demeanour – just as polite and sensitive persons adapt to all kinds of cross-class situations. Feminist researchers can do more. (Minister, 1991: 36)

In practice it is often difficult to know the 'social and historical contexts' of a narrator before the interview process commences so Minister's description is perhaps more idealistic than realistic. But her realisation that researchers determine the appropriateness of their language, clothing and manner when conducting research is important. The life story method involves a degree of what might be termed double scrutiny – narrators react to researchers as individuals not simply as researchers. The first meetings with a narrator are a process of mutual 'sizing up'. It is not surprising, therefore, that I altered elements of myself to suit different narrators. When interviewing Perween Warsi at her office, for

28 See special issue of *Professional Geographer* (1994) for discussion about how researchers are always already in the field.
instance, I wore a suit or skirt with jacket because the interview setting and relationship was fairly formal. I felt certain that if I dressed in jeans this would be taken to be disrespectful and a sign I was not professional. By contrast, when interviewing Bernice Green I did not want to appear too official and consequently wore casual clothes. Significantly Green was 'dressed up' for our first meeting but subsequently wore slippers and what she called her 'house clothes'. This, I feel was an indication that she felt comfortable and relaxed. When I first went to interview Nigella Lawson I wore my favourite 1960s vintage shoes. In my interview diary I noted that as soon as I arrived I felt overdressed, as though I was performing some form of ironic vintage 'stylishness' for her. This sense of discomfort permeated the entire encounter and contributed, as I recorded in my diary, to the ambivalence I felt about our recording session. Adapting clothes is an outward sign of the ways that a researcher brings to the research process a set of expectations that will inevitably impact on the research relationship. What is important to note, however, is how social interactions always involve degrees of negotiated performance, flexibility and diplomacy. The significance, therefore, is not so much the recognition that researchers perform as part of the research process but to assess that performance and its impact on the material collected.

In saying that researchers facilitate the interview processes by subtly highlighting or underplaying elements of their identity is not to say that researchers lie to respondents. I would not, for instance, deceive narrators about my political or ethical beliefs in order to elicit information from them, although I was less likely to offer an opinion if I felt it might lead to a narrator censoring their views (see Blee, 1998). For some of my narrators a significant factor in the material generated during the interview process was the result of a shared or similar political outlook. In preparing for a presentation about the process of being interviewed for a life story recording, Rosamund Grant, stated that one of the reasons she agreed to be interviewed was because she felt I shared with her some of what she termed 'basic beliefs in race and ethnicity.' This was made apparent to Grant when I explained that the term 'ethnicity' in the working title of my thesis included an examination of white Englishness. Grant agreed to be interviewed because, as she

29 Presentation to NSA 'Interviewer's Forum' held at the British Library conference centre, 22.10.02.
explained, 'you were not just interviewing me as the exotic.' For other narrators my political outlook was possibly less important than my previous experience working in various parts of the food industry. April Preston, an M&S Product Developer, for instance, was fairly candid about the compromises involved in retail food development. Her honesty resulted, in part, because she knew that having worked in the same industry I was likely to understand the problems she faced in making ethical commercial decisions.

With some narrators there were barriers that could not be crossed. When one food producer was overtly racist, for instance, I did not collude with him in order to elicit information but rather interrogated his attitudes and feelings, attempting to set them in the social, economic and historical context of his life. There were also many less dramatic instances where it was clear that the narrator and I did not share the same political framework. On the whole I would say that these interviews tended to result in recordings that contained less intimate material, although this was not universally the case. John Brewster, for instance, a wholesale butcher, a member of the City of London Corporation, the man held responsible for breaking the Smithfield workers union in the 80s, a staunch Thatcherite and Royalist, allowed me to record intimate details of his abandonment as an early child and early sexual experiences. In other words, political distance did not always result in distanced recordings but, in general, the life story interviews I feel the most ethically comfortable analysing and the ones I feel to be the most full and interesting are those that resulted from a close and trusting relation between me and the narrator. While some may consider the close relation between researcher and subject undermines the researcher's analytical capacity, I think it is possible to argue that this relation is the life story method's greatest strength. It is, for instance, almost impossible when conducting life story research not to feel empathetic and sympathetic towards the narrator. Empathy not only encourages the researcher to produce ethical research, but can provide insights into a narrator and their life that other forms of research cannot.

This relation comes with certain responsibilities and, at times, burdens. While the interview was in progress, as I have stated, I was often invited to share in additional aspects of a person's life. This was, for the most part, a pleasure and benefit of this type of
research but it was also very time-consuming and emotionally draining. In other words, while I think the best interviews resulted from personal rapport, these were also the interviews that took the most effort and time. Kristina Minister suggests that a mandate of feminist reflexive research is a working partnership with one's respondents. I would go further than Minister and suggest that the partnership relationship is almost inevitable when conducting life story research. This does not mean I do not recognise inequalities and tensions arising from this relation, but to a great degree life story research is conducted through willing collaborations and negotiations. A researcher must feel a degree of gratitude toward the narrator for agreeing to share their life story in the first place. This gratitude meant working as a partner with a narrator and discarding my research time frame in favour of their temporal expectations. Moreover, I was keen to solicit narrator's comments about the NLSC food project, about the development of my thesis and about other potential narrators. Another element of this partnership was my willingness for mutual self-disclosure. It seemed appropriate that if I was asking narrators to tell me about their lives that they should feel able to ask me about mine. Outside the time of recording their life story, therefore, questions flowed both ways.

Having outlined the broad implications of adopting a life story method and reflexive approaches to research, I wish draw attention to four specific areas that have determined my research material and analysis. These are the relation between me and my narrators, the status of different narrators, narrator motivation and the interview structure I adopted.

3.4.1 The Narrator and Researcher

As I have mentioned, a feature of the life story interview process with food producers has been the slippage between a professional research relationship and a more intimate personal relationship. Case by case the nature of this relation differs. Two food producer narrators were friends and one-time colleagues at M&S (April Preston and David Sillars). Some narrators have become friends through the life story process. We see each other socially (Jenny Linford, Rosamund Grant, Alan Yau, Jill Norman and Caroline Waldegrave). Others have not been in contact since their life story recording was completed but invited me to their homes during the research process. I shared meals with their families and spent time,
often hours, talking off-tape (Joyce Molyneux, Deepak Sharma, the Joshi family, Henrietta Green and Shawn Hill). In some instances the professional relation was maintained more clearly in that interviews took place at the British Library or the narrator’s work place. Even in these cases I was sometimes invited to join narrators for lunch at their home, in a restaurant or their workplace (John Brewster, Nigella Lawson, Wing Yip and Phillip Button). In only two cases did research never spill out beyond the boundary of a recorded interview, taking place at the narrator’s place of work (Perween Warsi & Claudia Roden30). In summary, therefore, the life story recordings with food producers often extended beyond the boundaries of the interview recording and invariably involved degrees of intimacy, affection and trust that might not be as pronounced in other forms of empirical research.

I suggest that two factors contributed to the relation between narrators and me and, therefore, the material recorded and analysed for this thesis. The first relates to the length of time life story interviews take to complete and the open-ended nature of the interview process. The second relates to food and its role in determining social relations, reciprocity and friendship. Of the former, the length of time taken to record a life story means that interviewer and narrator spend hours together over a period of weeks if not months. With a few exceptions I estimate that for every hour recorded I will have spent an additional two hours with the narrator ‘off record’, socialising or arranging future recording sessions. Not only does the length of time inevitably encourage greater intimacy but because interviews are often spread out over a few months I was privy to sequential events in the narrator’s life – moving house and changing job for example. When interviewing Alan Yau over a six month period he opened his Chinese restaurant Hakkasan and I saw first-hand the pressures and pleasures of launching a multi-million pound venture. On a number of occasions Yau was interrupted during recording sessions to attend an ‘emergency meeting’ with builders,

30 Significantly of all the interviews conducted these were the only ones where the narrators objected or refused to sign clearance forms. Warsi, despite four letters and numerous phone calls, has never returned a signed form. Roden listened to all of her recordings and stipulated on her consent form that I erase one side of a whole tape, even though it was possible for her to embargo her tapes for any period of time. Editing and erasing of tapes presents ethical and methodological problems for oral historians in that it interferes with primary sources. There is not the room here to discuss in detail these two cases but it suggests that the relation between the narrator and me impacted on narrators’ decisions to sign their consent forms. This suggests that narrators entrusted their recordings to me on the basis, in part, of a personal relationship which raises a host of questions, some covered above, about trust, representation and the possible re-use of materials by people other than myself.
On other occasions I sat for up to two hours in a glass walled office waiting for a delayed Yau to arrive. Yau's moods on these occasions ranged from mania to exhaustion and from elation to dismay. At a time when almost every other element of Yau's life was unpredictable, he said that our prearranged sessions provided him with an opportunity to reflect. Length of time and repeated visits are characteristic of life story interviewing and these help develop close and intimate relations. Moreover, the open-ended nature of life story interviews encourages narrators not only to describe events but to reflect on feelings and attitudes. Unsurprisingly at times this results in narrators relating highly personal, often private and emotional information. The person with whom this information is shared is placed in a position of trust and is likely to be moved and flattered. In asking for information of an emotional nature the interviewer facilitates a level of intimacy in which disinterested objectivity is inappropriate. By accepting this invitation and sharing private and emotional memories or feelings, the narrator places the interviewer in a position of trust that inevitably involves a degree of closeness.

Moreover, if the life story process in general can provide the context to facilitate close relationships between the research subject and researcher, the specific topic of food was also a significant factor in this relation. As I have noted in the previous chapter, food is bound up with the display and maintenance of social relations at a number of different scales. That I was interviewing people because of their professional and personal relationship with food structured and framed the interview process and provided numerous opportunities for the relation between me and narrator to extend beyond the remit of life story recording. Again this differed on a case by case basis but the reciprocal sharing of food was a feature of many interview sessions. When I first went to interview Joyce Molyneux, a woman restaurateur, she prepared me a three-course lunch including home-made bread, elder-flower jelly and petit fours. When I returned to complete the recording I brought her a bag of figs from my father's garden and a bottle of her favourite wine. The Joshi family in Leicester, as I have noted, invited me for lunch and dinner, showed me how to make chapattis and sent me home on the last train to London with seven Tupperware boxes of food to share with my partner. The motivation for the degree of food exchange and sharing was not straightforward. From my perspective giving narrators food or cooking
them a meal was, in part, a way of thanking them for giving so much of their time to the research process. The motivation for narrators differed but at times it seemed as though providing food was inextricably bound up with a performance of their relation, expertise and knowledge of food. In other words narrators may have felt pressured to demonstrate their expertise and to validate their selection as narrators. More clearly, though, narrators fed me to establish a degree of intimacy. As has been noted by others, the sharing of food and the acceptance of hospitality changes the nature of a relationship and is often the first step in establishing close bonds (Visser, 1986). Food therefore played both a theoretical role in shaping the life story interviews but a practical one as well, helping develop trust, mutual obligation and providing a way to display specialised knowledge.

It could be argued that the blurring of the boundary between objective and subjective researcher and the intimate nature of these relationships has the effect of constraining and altering the analytical process. In presenting my interpretation of recordings and conversations and drawing from my interview diaries that recorded, among other things, the development of a relationship, I risk not only my professional reputation but also relationships based on mutual affection. This, perhaps, places limits on the analytical process. But rather than see this as inherently suspect, the life story method brings into question the possibility and desirability of objective and disinterested research and highlights the ethical and political dimension of any ethnographic work. Rather than ignore or hide the research context and relationship, for example, the life story method can put them on display and render them available for scrutiny. Because life story recordings are not monologues and involve interaction and mutual questions, audiences may assess the significance of the interviewer's impact on the process. Towards the end of my interview with Rosamund Grant, for instance, she describes how her trust in me developed over the months of recording. In response to my asking her to reflect on her initial reticence at being interviewed by a white woman 'employed' by the British Library, an institution associated, in Grant's eyes, with British white power she said: 'I knew you were open minded by the way you responded to things Polly'. Grant's statement makes clear her awareness of and negotiation with the power relations inherent in the research process. Talking about
feminist approaches to interviewing, Naples suggests that rather than strive for
‘objectivity’, researchers should embrace an ‘ethics of caring’:

Rather than attempt to keep a distanced stance in an effort to achieve more
‘objective’ analyses, feminist scholars acknowledge that power is infused in social
relations including in relationships between researchers and ‘informants.’ On the
other hand the ‘ethic of caring’ forms one strategy to break down power
differentials and experiential differences between the researcher and the researched.
(Naples, 1997: 88)

Naples’ observations highlight how ethnographic research involves the researcher in a
process that is inevitably bound up with the ethics and politics of trust, confidentiality and
openness (see also Blee, 1993; Borland, 1993; Gluck & Patai, 1991). Grant’s statement
does not detract from the significance or meaning of her life story recording as a historical
and cultural document, but emphasises the politics and relations that contributed to its
recording, of which mine and Grant’s developing friendship is one.

3.4.2 ‘Elite’ and ‘Non-Elite’ Narrators

Oral history has characteristically been championed as a means of recovering ‘hidden
histories’. As Alessandro Portelli explains:

Oral sources are a necessary (not a sufficient) condition for a history of the non­
hegemonic classes; they are less necessary (though by no means useless) for the
history of the ruling classes, who have had control over writing and leave behind a
much more abundant written record. (Portelli, 1991: 72)

In part, therefore, the political agenda that has shaped much oral history research in the last
fifty years has focused on the task of ‘recovering’ and ‘preserving’ the histories of those
without power. In recent years, however, oral historians have begun to question the extent
to which ‘non-hegemonic’ classes can be ‘given voice’ through oral history practice, even if
that practice is collaborative and democratic. What respondents gain from partaking in life
story research will, of course differ from project to project, with some being more involved
than others in determining the future presentation and interpretation of their recordings.
Oral history, for example, is not only practised by academics but by community groups, in
schools and local history societies. Oral history, therefore, provides a means for people who
are not professional historians to produce their own histories. Moreover, oral history has
played a large part in reminiscence and testimony, and the social and psychological import
of this work for the participants has been widely noted (see Bornat, 1994; White, 1998).
With oral history research conducted within academic or institutional bodies, however, whatever the political intention of the researcher, the control of historical discourse remains primarily in the hands of the historian through the processes of selection, interpretation and presentation. Even when historians and researchers attempt to encompass Michael Frisch’s (1990) proposal to resolve the issue of power with the notion of ‘shared authority’, the ability to disseminate and represent is likely to be in the hands of the researcher. In describing the problems of researching non-elite subjects (cleaners) for an oral history project, Gillian Elinor explains:

The women were not theoretically self-conscious and theory could arise only from outside of the personal interview. The individual woman could be said to be representative, in her work, of the social relations of her position. But to theorise her, with quotation, felt like pinching her story, her clothes, for refashioning at the template. In addition, the nuance of the source meaning, of transcript, would disappear. (Elinor, 1992: 78)

As Elinor makes clear, researching non-elite subjects highlights the problems associated with any form of representation. In using food producer life stories to explore food’s relation to identity, I have taken elements of narrative accounts to illustrate and explicate my analysis. This has involved striking the balance between my own research agenda and the integrity of individuals’ accounts. With those narrators with whom I built a close relationship I have been able to talk in general terms about how their life stories are used in the thesis. This, however, has not, for different reasons, always been possible. In some cases I feel sure that the food producers would object to my interpretation of their narratives and this raises important questions about the ethics of analysis that is beyond the scope of this thesis.  

31 A solution to this problem could be to anonymise interview extracts in the thesis but the life stories of well known food industry people makes this almost impossible. It would, for instance, be difficult to talk about a female Indian multi-millionaire food manufacturer without it being easy to identify Perween Warsi. Using life story extracts necessarily exposes the narrator in my analysis and on this issue I feel fairly conflicted and unresolved. In particular I feel Henrietta Green, whose life story I used to explore food’s relation to cultural capital, would object and feel somewhat betrayed by my analysis but nevertheless I stand by my interpretation. The politics of interpretation also raise questions about publishing and copyright. Where food producers embargoed their interview release form I verbally asked them permission to use their recordings for my thesis with the stipulation that if the thesis is made public or published I let them know exactly which extracts I had used. Without exception all food producers agreed to this arrangement but it has meant that I am writing with the knowledge that if I want to stand by my analysis I may not be able to make my thesis widely available.
A second problem raised by the process of representation and interpretation is that even when oral history is used to ‘give voice’, this serves the interest of professional researchers who are personally invested in the production of knowledge. As Elinor explains, ‘(a)cademic careers are in this way made, and oral researchers must be most culpable of all as bearers of quite other pretensions, history from the ‘bottom up’ for instance’ (Elinor, 1992: 78). In other words, even if it is directed by a democratic agenda, oral history and ethnographic research will always perpetuate the economic and cultural capital of individual researchers and this cannot be ignored.

However, because the political framework of oral history has tended to emphasise and focus on the goal of ‘giving voice’, the relative power of the researcher compared with the narrator is assumed and, at times, oversimplified. Contemporary oral history and social science research is rooted in progressive and feminist politics and has striven to take account of those traditionally absent from ‘official’ accounts, those on the margins, those defined as ‘other.’ The attempt to uncover and reflect upon the power dynamics of interviews, therefore, has not sufficiently accounted for those life story recordings that complicate this assumption. According to Kathleen Blee this has meant that, ‘(h)istorians have paid less attention to the life stories of ordinary people whose political agendas they find unsavoury, dangerous, or deliberately deceptive’ (Blee, 1998: 333). Blee’s interviews with former Ku Klux Klan members forced her, for instance, to address issues of empathy and the ethics raised when her informants assumed she shared their racist views. As she states:

Although it might be comforting if we could find no commonality of thought of experience with those who are drawn into far-right politics, my interviews suggest a more complicated and a more disturbing reality. It was fairly ordinary people – people with considered opinions, people who loved their families and could be generous to neighbours and friends – who were the mainstay of the 1920s Klan. (Blee, 1998: 339)

Blee’s analysis of her research with the Klan suggests one way that issues of power raised by interviewing ‘non elite’ people can be complicated. Moreover, the focus on the politics of interviewing the non-hegemonic has left relatively unexamined the processes and
politics of recording the life story of those who might be termed ‘elite’. Eva McMahan’s research provides an important exception. She defines the ‘elite’ as, ‘those persons who develop a lore that justifies their attempts to control society’ (McMahan, 1989: xiv). In using the term elite, therefore, I refer to those who have overt historical/political/cultural significance and power and who are conscious of the impact of their information.

Interviewing a cross section of those involved in the food industry involved recording with a number of people who could be categorised as ‘elite’. These would include Caroline Waldegrave, John Brewster, April Preston and Nigella Lawson, all of whom have influence in government circles either through their personal relations and/or work and who are in a position to influence, to some degree, attitudes towards food, food availability, laws governing food and food prices. Moreover, the commercial success and personal wealth of food producers Wing Yip, Perween Warsi and Alan Yau means that they also could be classified as elite in that they have relative commercial autonomy and influence the food market directly through retail, manufacturing and design. Interviewing these people complicates the assumption that the researcher is inevitably in a position of power compared with the narrator. At times I felt (and was made to feel) the power differential between narrators and me. When I arrived to record the first session with Perween Warsi, for instance, she would not consent to see me until I had negotiated with her lawyer, through her Head of PR, the confidentiality of our interview. Interviewing with the potential legal scrutiny certainly checked my power as a researcher. There is not the scope here to talk about each interview relation in detail but it is important to note that the assumption of my power is an oversimplification of a process that differed depending on who was being recorded and the context of that recording.

3.4.3 Narrator Motivation

In considering the factors and relations that shape the life story recording, food producer motivation in agreeing to be interviewed needs considering. Some food producers I interviewed, for personal and professional reasons, are highly invested in the food industry. Claudia Roden, for example, a renowned cookery book writer, detailed how cooking Middle Eastern food for her émigré Jewish Egyptian family in the 1950s perpetuated cultural bonds in a strange and hostile environment – for Roden food functions
as a practical means by which cultural identities are reconstituted and experienced as a political process. As a high investor in the food industry Roden saw herself both as an upholder of traditions and an agent of change (for the better). Roden explained, for instance, that her desire to publish her family’s recipes was to challenge British preconceptions about Middle Eastern culture. For Roden, and a number of other, often high profile food producers the incentive to agreeing to be interviewed was the opportunity to record their contributions to shaping British culinary culture. Anne Dolemore, a food publisher, advisor to the food lobbying group SUSTAIN and a member of the Food Writers’ Guild, for example, detailed her part in leading the successful campaign against genetically modified food in 1999. Alan Yau, an entrepreneurial restaurateur, talked about his vision of ‘democratising good food’ via the noodle chain Wagamama.

I want to emphasise my recognition, however, that working in the food industry does not provide all food producers with the same opportunities to challenge, protect or change culinary culture. For those involved in much of the labour of food production, especially seasonal migrant workers, part-time factory employees or the people who staff much of the fast food industry and retail sector, it is likely that working in the food industry is a key way they encounter social and economic inequalities about which they can do little (see Ehrenreich, 2002 and Schlosser, 2001). In exploring how food producer identity is configured in relation to culinary culture it could be argued that oral history privileges those with significant cultural and economic capital who tend to have strong agendas and see themselves as agents of change or protectors of tradition. Life stories can, however, provide opportunities for narrators from across the social spectrum to understand their personal histories as significant and shaping. Bernice Green, a first generation Jamaican woman who worked as a caterer for London Transport and then as a school cook for a London comprehensive initially felt she had nothing important to say about her work with food. Green had, however, witnessed dramatic changes in the British diet, shifts in attitudes towards healthy eating and increased health and safety legislation. Although Green’s work in the food industry was primarily the result of economic necessity rather than a political or ideological agenda, her story says much about immigrant experiences in London as well as attitudes to food and food preparation in the 1960s. In agreeing to
record their life stories, even individuals who might be described as being low investors in the food industry may be attracted to the idea that they bear witness to change or tradition.

I am certain that most people agreed to the long process of recording their life story because of my association with the BL and because the recordings have been archived and are, therefore, a form of personal legacy. While I always highlighted that recordings might be used as part of a PhD thesis, the ‘Food: From Source to Salespoint’ NLSC project framed my approach and explanations to producers. Without doubt the relation with the BLNLSC had a number and range of effects, some of which are worth accounting for. First, the status and reputation of the BL meant that I was able to gain access to people who might have ignored an approach from a PhD student only connected to a university.

People explained their decision to be interviewed differently. Jill Norman, publisher for Elizabeth David in the 1960s and 1970s, was motivated, in part, by a desire to record her memories of her close relation to David and her awareness that she had witnessed and contributed to changes towards food and cooking in the publishing field. The Joshi family wanted to make a public record of their experiences as Ugandan Indian migrants to Britain. Asked to reflect on how the connection with the BL shaped her decision to be recorded, Rosamund Grant described a conflict. On the one hand she saw her recordings as a step towards the acknowledgement of the black community’s contribution to British life. On the other hand she was suspicious that her interview might be misappropriated by the British Library, a ‘white British institution’. In each case, therefore, the association with the BLNLSC conjured up a host of connections, meanings and associations for narrators that impacted on their decision to be recorded and the nature of the recording.

The effect of the project’s connection with the BLNLSC on the life story material collected was significant. Rosamund Grant, Bernice Green and Jenny Linford have all commented that during interviews they were conscious not only of me but also the tape recorder as an audience. The tape recorder signified for them the BLNLSC and was a reminder that their recordings might be listened to by an unknown audience in the future. Rosamund Grant talked of the ‘internal editing’ process at work when she was being recorded. Grant
described a sense of responsibility for representing herself, her family and her community to this unknowable future listener. On a few occasions narrators refused to answer a question while being recorded saying 'that's not suitable for the BL'\textsuperscript{32}. When the tape recorder was turned off, the narrator would normally reveal the answer to the question they refused to record. For most food producers the BLNLSC acted as an enticement to be interviewed but also had a restraining influence on their recordings. In thinking reflexively about the life story recordings collected for this thesis it is important to acknowledge that the association with a large, powerful and traditional institution facilitated and shaped the research process and findings.

3.4.4 The Interview Structure

My interviewing strategy and the NLSC remit also impacted on the style of life story recordings collected for this thesis. By avoiding a rigid interview structure or research agenda the recordings attempted to reflect the different ways that individuals narrate their life story if given the opportunity. Sidone Smith argues that:

> When people assigned in varying ways to the cultural position of 'other' speak as autobiographical subjects, they consciously and/or unconsciously negotiate the laws of genre that work to construct them as culturally recognisable subjects. These laws establish rules of inclusion and exclusion and set the terms for participation in privileged or canonical forms. (Smith, 1993: 404)

In interviewing food producers the research did, to some degree, follow a standard oral history interview framework involving a focus on a particular topic - food and its relation to identity - and a set of questions intended to explore and elicit information. Because I was working within the NLSC remit, I was also mindful of the importance of recording as full a life story as possible and thus followed the convention of loosely based chronological interviewing. The chronological trajectory of NLSC interviews formed a central element of the research’s attempt to explore food and its relation to identity as connected to different times and spaces of a food producer’s life. This structure may well have encouraged narrators to present culturally acceptable narratives in accordance with Smith’s description, but as far as possible I attempted to accommodate and facilitate the narrator’s voice and account. Although, for instance, for every interview I asked questions

\textsuperscript{32} Phillip Button
intended to enable me to examine the role of food throughout a narrator's life, I did not have a fixed list of questions. This procedure was inextricably related to the recognition that life stories are highly individualistic and collaborative. Life story research challenges the idea that people are interchangeable and consequently demands of the researcher a high degree of flexibility in framing questions appropriately.

In practice I did ask narrators a number of the same questions, in particular those relating to their ethnicity, gender and class and its relation to their professional and personal food practices. But working through a list of prescribed questions imposes the researcher's agenda onto the narrator in a way I wanted to avoid. In adopting an open interview strategy, I hoped to provide what Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack suggest is an opportunity for narrators to 'explore complex and conflicting experiences in their lives' (Anderson & Jack, 1991: 23). Where possible, I asked narrators to describe events, actions and things but also to reflect upon their subjective emotional experience of them so that they are given meaning within the context of that narrator's life. Significantly I did not only attend closely to my questions but attempted to listen carefully to their answers. I tried, for instance, to attend to the narrator's moral language, to question what values and beliefs were shaping the narrative. I also endeavoured to trust the logic of the narrative. In other words, I attempted to trust the narrator's narrative trajectory, rather than imposing my own. This meant, on occasion, listening to long anecdotes that seemed to bear little relation to the topic of food or the particular question being asked. The life story method, therefore, is associated with a number of conventions, and while I used these as guides to shape my research, I tried to do so in a way that meant they were not prescriptive or restrictive.

3.5 Life Story Analysis

In this final section I outline the processes involved in analysing and interpreting my life story recordings. A particular challenge raised by using the life story process for PhD research is the amount of material generated and the problem of how to organise, select and edit from this. My analysis is certainly not exhaustive. Although I have interviewed 40 food producers, only 24 are quoted directly in the thesis. To account for every producer I
interviewed would have meant a broader and less in depth analysis and would have detracted from the life story in rendering the individual as significant and specific. Though I prepared summaries and reflected on all the interviews I conducted, I chose to focus on food producers who could best shed light on the themes I selected to discuss.

To arrive at the arguments presented in my thesis I have undertaken a number of concurrent processes. These various analytical strategies allow me to tell what I hope is a compelling story and one that is faithful to the interviews. The first step in the analytical process was summarising, transcribing and accessioning my research material. My CASE award stipulated that I was responsible for providing interview summaries in accordance with the NLSC depositing procedure for every interview collected. The NLSC places summaries of life story interviews on the BL on-line catalogue (CADENSA). The average length of a summary is limited due to catalogue capacity to 250 words per half hour of recording. The summaries outline the main highlights of each side of every tape and provide public readers with a sense of the interview and an ability to search specific terms. These summaries provide a quick means of navigating a long interview but they are ultimately not detailed enough to be used for research analysis. This concise summary, however, was invaluable in familiarising me with the material I was cumulatively collecting.

In addition to the NLSC summaries I adopted my own summary procedure. After every recording session I made detailed summaries for every side of every tape recorded. These summaries varied in length but were generally four typed pages per half hour of tape and included loose transcriptions of narrative I felt might become part of my thesis analysis. The ongoing summary process meant that while collecting data I was able to consider emerging themes for my thesis. The analytical process involved applying various levels of increasingly abstract 'coding', re-reading the summaries and re-listening to sections of the tapes in order to build up an analysis. Throughout this process I have developed a range of codes. Some of these are central to the structure of my thesis so that, for instance, where a narrator talked about their ethnicity or about their attitudes towards 'tradition,' I was able to draw directly from these. Some of my coding strategies involved noting what I termed 'extra-textual' elements of interviews – the 'tone' of the
interview and significant details of the interview context for instance. On completing the life story recordings and starting to plan and write my thesis I returned to my detailed summaries and used them to navigate my way through lengthy interviews. When using a life story extract in my thesis I have returned to the tape recording and made a verbatim transcript.

As I have mentioned, I also maintained an interview diary throughout the research period. I wrote in this before and after any recording session, noting my apprehensions, aims and feelings towards a particular situation or narrator. Often this was the place where I expressed anxiety about an interview situation or frustration about the progression or direction of a recording. The diary was also the space where I wrote about the elements of meeting with a food producer that were ‘extra-textual’ to the recording itself. These included notes about informal conversations or information deemed to be ‘too private’ to state on tape, details about shared meals, tours around homes or work places and descriptions of the narrator’s home and family. Although many elements of the diaries are confidential and therefore do not appear in the thesis, I found them invaluable in reminding me of the context in which particular interviews and events took place.

In addition to making detailed tape summaries, coding my research findings and writing my research diary, I tacked back and forth between my interviews and a range of literature. This allowed me to theoretically ground and inform my method, while also enabling me to draw from my fieldwork experiences when engaged with theoretical readings. Influenced by the theoretical understanding of identity as contingent and relational, and the methodological experience of life stories being fluid and shifting, I was extremely keen to prevent treating emergent themes as distinctly separate. I wanted, for instance, to avoid developing separate chapters on ethnicity, gender and class and instead understood them as mutually constituted through the food industry narratives of multiculturalism, authenticity and domesticity. A number of different factors, outlined in more detail at the start of each empirical chapter, determined my selection of these particular narratives. First, around the time I embarked upon my thesis a body of research focusing on British culinary culture was published (Cook and Crang, 1996; Cook et al, 1996, 1998, 1999). This work emphasised authenticating narratives and multicultural narratives as a key feature of British culinary
culture. Second, drawing from my experiences of working in the food industry, particularly as a product developer, I was aware of the commercial strength of associating food products or practices with narratives of multiculture, authenticity and domesticity through the use of images and descriptions on packaging and advertising. My personal experiences confirmed, therefore, that these particular narratives were a prevalent feature of British culinary culture. This conviction was supported, in part, by a Food Advisory Committee report (2001) aimed at food producers which set out guidelines for the use of terms such as ‘homemade,’ ‘farmhouse,’ ‘authentic’ and ‘real’. This report recognised the widespread and potentially misleading use of these terms in the food industry. I determined that these terms, in different ways, were explicitly and implicitly bound up with narratives of multiculture, authenticity and domesticity. In the empirical chapters that follow I set out conventional understandings of food’s relation to ethnicity, gender and class and describe how these are made manifest in culinary culture through narratives of multiculturalism, domesticity and authenticity. Although others have drawn attention to the prevalence of various narratives in British culinary culture, I feel these do not sufficiently account for the experiences of individual food producers and the ways they negotiate, mobilise, produce and contest narratives in the commercial practice of food production and as part of the discursive practices of identity.

In sum, life stories provide a means of examining how individual food producers experience, negotiate and mobilise food industry narratives as part of their commercial practices and as such unsettle conventional understandings of food’s relation to identity. Life stories are used not only to capture the messiness of everyday life but to argue that this messiness is theoretically and politically significant. In particular my reading suggests that this messiness makes possible a range of possibilities beyond the limitations of conventional accounts of food’s relation to identity, that are more or less potentially empowering for those involved in the food industry.

---

33 Food Advisory Committee Review of the use of the terms Fresh, Pure, Natural etc. in Food Labelling 2001.
3.6 Life story recordings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Profession and 'Ethnicity'</th>
<th>Hours Recording</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Shiv Ajib</td>
<td>Punjabi restaurateur</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Faisal Ali</td>
<td>Indian retailer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Phillip Button</td>
<td>English spice trade broker</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Harry Clegg</td>
<td>English Army Catering Corp officer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Anne Dolemore</td>
<td>English food book publisher</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Chirstos Epaminondas</td>
<td>Greek Cypriot retailer</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Peter Gordon</td>
<td>New Zealand chef &amp; restaurateur</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Rosamund Grant</td>
<td>Guyanese cookery writer &amp; restaurateur</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Bernice Green</td>
<td>Jamaican caterer</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Henrietta Green</td>
<td>British food specialist &amp; cookery writer</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Elaine Hallgarten</td>
<td>Food writer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Stephen Hallam</td>
<td>English craft baker</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Shaun Hill</td>
<td>British chef</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Shezad Hussain</td>
<td>Pakistani cookery writer &amp; consultant</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Peter Jacomelli</td>
<td>Thai restaurateur</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Anil Joshi</td>
<td>Indian retailer &amp; sweet manufacturer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Dayashanker Joshi</td>
<td>Indian retailer &amp; sweet manufacturer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Prakash Joshi</td>
<td>Indian retailer &amp; sweet manufacturer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Maish Joshi</td>
<td>Indian retailer &amp; sweet manufacturer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Jay Joshi</td>
<td>Indian retailer &amp; sweet manufacturer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Nigella Lawson</td>
<td>English cookery writer &amp; media personality</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Jenny Linford</td>
<td>English/Singaporean food writer</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Joyce Molyneux</td>
<td>English chef</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 James Murphy</td>
<td>English Food photographer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Jill Norman</td>
<td>English publisher and editor</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Kenneth Parr</td>
<td>English pork pie manufacturer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Marguerite Patten</td>
<td>English cookery book writer</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Shiv Prakash</td>
<td>Indian retailer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 April Preston</td>
<td>English food buyer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Duncan Robertson</td>
<td>British Army Catering Corp colonel</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Life story recordings continued:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Profession and 'Ethnicity'</th>
<th>Hours Recording</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31 Claudia Roden</td>
<td>Egyptian cookery writer &amp; historian</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 Peter Roger</td>
<td>Tuscanese Restaurateur</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 Frieda Roger</td>
<td>Tuscanese Restaurateur</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 Deepak Sharma</td>
<td>Indian food</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 David Sillars</td>
<td>Scottish food manufacturer</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 Brian Skelston</td>
<td>English food manufacturer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 Caroline Waldegrave</td>
<td>English cookery school Principal</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 Perween Warsi</td>
<td>Indian food manufacturer</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 Alan Yau</td>
<td>Chinese restaurateur</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 Wing Yip</td>
<td>Chinese retailer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total hours: 309

Thesis Interview Reference Procedure

When using extracts from a food producer life story for the first time, I note the name of the narrator, the narrator's date and place of birth, their profession, the name of the interviewer, the number and side of the tape where the quote is recorded, the date of the recording and the NLSC tape catalogue reference number. A first time reference to a food producer interview therefore looks like this:

*Interview with Rosamund Grant, born Guyana 1956, cookery writer/restaurateur/psychoanalyst, recorded by Polly Russell, 9.1.01, Tape 11 Side B, C821/35/09*

When using extracts from a life story that has previously been given full reference details I provide the narrator's name, the year of the interview, the tape number and side and the NLSC. A reference to a food producer interview that has previously been mentioned therefore look like this:

*Interview with Rosamund Grant (2001) Tape 11, Side B, C821/35/09*
CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVES OF MULTICULTURAL CULINARY CULTURE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the politics underlying the connection between food and ethnicity in British culinary culture. More specifically, I consider the 'ways in which culinary culture acts as an arena through which understandings of British national identity, and especially British multi-culture, are constructed and practised' (Cook et al. 1999: 225).

Drawing from recent public debate about British identity, the chapter will examine how food is invoked and imagined as part of an optimistic narrative about multi-cultural identity, at a range of different scales. In contrast to this optimistic perspective, some view the marketing and availability of 'ethnic' food as the symbol and practice of 'cultural colonisation'. In this chapter I analyse these divergent positions in relation to the life stories of a number of food producers.

Focusing my analysis through what I shall term 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' readings of British multicultural culinary culture serves as shorthand for a range of complex differences. Optimistic readings, for instance, include those that celebrate the possibilities of multicultural tolerance and commercial success without the use of racialised stereotypes. Pessimistic narratives, meanwhile, may include attempts to highlight unequal social relations at work in the consumption and production of food, and the politics involved in the widespread focus on ethnic 'difference' in the commercial sphere. In addition to unsettling these various optimistic and pessimistic readings of commodified 'difference' and British culinary culture, my reading also highlights commercial culture as an everyday practice that is negotiated and shaped by individual histories, subjectivities and politics. Ultimately, both optimistic and pessimistic accounts of multicultural culinary culture rely on essentialised and fixed imaginings of ethnicity. By applying Appadurai's (1986) notions of 'enclaving' and 'diversion' to examine the life stories and commercial strategies of food producers I hope to establish how different kinds of difference sell in different times and places to different audiences with different effects. This will highlight food's relation to identity as a contested, contingent and relational process. 'Enclaving' and 'diversion' implicitly invoke notions of movement and fluidity and provide a means of surpassing essentialist
constructions of food and its relation to ethnicity by recognising how food producers, with varying degrees of reflexivity, mobilise the boundaries of ethnicity as part of their commercial practices.

My exploration suggests that individual food producers, to some degree, at different times and to different ends, negotiate, utilise and reject the imposed/supposed relationship between food and ethnicity. Ultimately this chapter attempts to move beyond the limitations of conventional narratives by thinking through the messy boundaries of food and identity construction as narrated in individual life stories. In so doing I share Uma Narayan's assertion that:

Thinking about food has much to reveal about how we understand our personal and collective identities. Seemingly rich acts of eating are flavoured with complicated and sometimes contradictory cultural meanings. Thinking about food can help reveal the rich and messy textures of our attempts at self understanding, as well as our interesting and problematic understandings of our relationship to social Others. (Narayan, 1995: 64)

This chapter starts by outlining the prevalence and politics of discourses of ethnicity in British culinary culture.

4.2 'Ethnic' Food, 'Ethnic' People

One of the tasks undertaken by my research has been to unsettle straightforward connections between people's ethnicity and particular food practices. This reflects a determination to avoid reifying standard classificatory boundaries of 'ethnicity' as well as an understanding of the food industry where the relation between food and identity is, in practice, often messy and unclear. I did not, therefore, aim to examine one ethnicity or other by providing, for example, an account of Indianess or Englishness through food, but instead was focussed on thinking about the role of food in structuring boundaries of identity. While I have not examined food as a reflection of pre-existing cultures but a way that the cultural identities are produced, constituted and performed, it is still crucial to think how notions of pre-existing culture might inform food producers' motivations, actions and products. The bounding together of foods associated with various 'ethnic' identities, for instance, is a key feature of the food industry and of British culinary culture (Cook et al., 1996). As food industry market reports make clear, the ethnic food sector in Britain is worth a total of £3.7 billion of the British food market and is likely to continue growing (Mintel, 1998: 6-7). In an article about the food
industry practices of category management, Cook et al note that ethnicity is central to
the organizational logic of food retail (Cook et al. 1999). ‘Ethnic’ categories – Indian,
Italian or Chinese, for example - determine both the layout of shop floors and
departmental buying structures.

It is important to note that ethnicity for the purposes of my research is understood to
refer to processes and practices that include but also exceed the explicit references to
ethnicity and ethnic food that saturate the food industry. Implicitly the industry category
of ethnic food infers a relation to an imagined group of people with a particular ethnicity
– Indian, Caribbean or Japanese, for example. We might suppose, therefore, that people
whose food practices are left out of the vague category of ‘ethnic’ do not have an
ethnicity. In other words, ethnic identification involves a delineation of difference
against which a given ethnicity is compared and contrasted (Bonnett, 1996). In
describing culinary culture Cook et al note that ‘ethnic foods are ‘ethnic’ through their
association with ‘ethnic’ people...in turn, not all people are ‘ethnic’, it seems’ (Cook et
al, 1999: 229). That certain identities are imagined and produced as ethnic while others
are not is confirmed by recent research investigating the relation between consumption
and identity conducted in North London. The findings of this research suggested that
‘whiteness’, and its association with Englishness, is not articulated as a form of
ethnicity: ‘Most white respondents did not see themselves as ethnically marked at all,
and expressed their identifications almost entirely through the language of class and
gender’ (Jackson, 1998b: 103). The categorisation of food as ‘ethnic’ signifies explicit
demarcations of difference against which the supposed ‘norm’ of (white) Britishness is a
constant, though implicit, structuring presence.

In defining food as ‘ethnic’ or ‘exotic’, or even as ‘Indian’, ‘Chinese’ or ‘Italian’,
British food, and by association Britishness, is made, by inference, ‘normal’.
‘Britishness’ and even more so ‘Englishness’ is often explicitly absent from, and yet
implicitly structuring, identity discourses of the food industry and lived food practices in
Britain. For instance, while it is possible to ‘go for an Indian’ or ‘have a Chinese’ or
‘fancy an Italian’, we would never say we are ‘going for a British’, or ‘having an

---

1 For a detailed description and analysis of the use of the term ‘ethnic’ in the food industry and food trade
press see Cook et al 1999.

2 For a more detailed examination of the historical and political significance of the terms ‘British’ and
English’. Significantly, while supermarkets are experts at producing, buying and marketing the foods of ‘others’ they do not produce ‘British’ ranges with the same degree of corporate organisational focus. Specific suppliers, for instance, are dedicated to producing ‘ethnic’ food, particular buying departments will be focused on ‘Indian’ ‘Chinese’ and ‘Italian’ ranges and shelf space is reserved for ‘ethnic’ range displays. By contrast, to my knowledge, there are no major retailers with a British food buying department or even clearly demarcated (through packaging or position in store) British food ranges.3

In part this may result from certain logics of production in mainstream food retail. In other words, ‘ethnic’ foods which are so neatly bound into definable sections both at retail head offices and on shop-floors, are smaller and more compact categories than those which might be defined as ‘British’. Moreover, supermarket buyers and packaging co-ordinators argue that ‘ethnic’ ranges need cohesive packaging to ensure, to use retailing speak, they ‘sit well’ together and also to explain to customers, through pictorial inference and explicit instructions, how to cook and eat food that may be new to them.4 Given, however, the increasing reliance on ready meals it is as likely that many ethnically British people would find making ‘traditional’ British dishes such as toad-in-the-hole or steam pudding as new and potentially difficult as making ‘ethnic’ food. Moreover, the logic requiring ‘ethnic’ foods be explained to customers takes no account of the possibility that customers might be British Asian, British Cypriot or British Italian, for example, and consequentially more acquainted with ‘ethnic’ food than ‘British’ food.5 While the logic of production may partially determine the widespread bounding of food into distinct culinary cultures with a notable absence of ‘British food’, these mechanics are clearly culturally inscribed.

3 When I was working as a Product Developer for M&S there was discussion about introducing a ‘Best of British’ range of products with ready meals such as ‘toad in the hole’, Lancashire hot pot and Shepherd’s pie. It was felt, however, that the range might ‘offend’ the Scottish, Irish and Welsh and risk antagonising regions with their own specialised food traditions. In the event ‘British food’ remained unmarked as a finished product and bought by different departments depending on whether it was chilled, ambient, frozen or a ready meals product.

4 A central question in the product development of new foods is whether customers ‘are ready for them’, with the assumption that certain ingredients, flavours and styles of eating are ‘too foreign’ for the ‘typical’ British customer palette.

5 My exploration of narratives of authenticity describes how through an embodied association with Indian food, Deepak Sharma, a British Indian food buyer for Marks & Spencer, attempts to broaden the M&S customer base by appealing to British Asians.
This is not to say, however, that notions of ‘Britishness’ are absent in the food industry narratives or practices. Henrietta Green’s Food Lover’s Fairs, the increased market share of British cheeses, the media focus on chefs associated with British cooking traditions such as Marguerite Patten and Gary Rhodes and moves towards legally classifying and registering ‘traditional’ products like Stilton cheese and Cornish pasties are examples of ways that the ‘Britishness’ of certain foods and food practices are self-consciously being marketed and produced at the present time (see Iblery & Kncafsy, 2000a). My concern therefore is not whether British food does or does not exist but rather that ‘ethnic’ food, and by association ‘ethnicness’ is subject to critical enquiry, while notions of ‘British’ food, and by association Britishness, remain unexamined.

In a sense ‘ethnic’ foods and their connection with ‘ethnic’ people are imaginatively constructed against imaginings of a traditional and ethnically homogenous British past. In my final chapter I suggest that narratives of authenticity are one way that exclusionary notions of Britishness are continually reinvented. Although the focus in this chapter is on ‘ethnically-othered’ food producers and narratives of multicultural culinary culture, the issues explored here are inextricably bound up with the politics and practices discussed in the subsequent chapters. It is important to note, moreover, that many of Britain’s most established and popular ‘traditional’ foods - kedgeree, fish and chips and tea, for example - have been created through cross-cultural connections and histories of migration, immigration and exploration. As Cook and Crang point out, ‘much of what we now refer to as ‘ethnic cuisine’ has a long history of entanglement in ‘British’ culinary culture, and, indeed, what we now refer to as ‘British’ culinary culture has a long history of entanglement in these ‘ethnic’ cuisines’ (Cook & Crang, 1996: 143).

That Britishness and Englishness, as opposed to Indianness, Chineseness or even Italianness, are seldom referred to as an ethnicity is evidence of the power structures at work in representation. As my interviews with Alan Yau, Claudia Roden, Rosamund Grant and Perween Warsi demonstrate, food has been and continues to be an enduring symbol of their integration into Britain. Simultaneously, however, food is also the sign that as racial and cultural ‘others’ they are also separate from what is conventionally defined as British. The much publicised fact that curry has overtaken ‘traditional’ ‘fish
and chips' as standard British fare is an emblematic though not unproblematic sign of this:

Indian restaurants are a popular British pastime it seems, but not British themselves. The logic here is all too clear. Indianness is something white British people enjoy consuming, but that does not make it, or the British-Asian restaurateurs and waiting staff who embody it, culturally British. Difference is appreciated and enjoyed, at least when it comes to food but it also distances those to who it is applied. (Crang & Jackson, 2001: 333)

In part, defining foods and the groups associated with these as 'ethnic' implicitly 'normalises' the British practices and identities from which 'other' culinary cultures are delineated.

An emphasis on ethnic food in British culinary culture, may be a manifestation of Jonathon Rutherford's contention that 'capital has fallen in love with difference.....cultural difference sells' (Rutherford, 1990: 11). Clearly, however, some forms of 'difference' are more commodifiable than others. Research about Jamaican pepper sauce details, for instance, that Caribbean food in England has not become as 'mainstream' as Indian, Chinese or Italian cuisine (Cook & Harrison, 2000). In recognising that not all forms 'difference' are equally subject to commodification, therefore, I also acknowledge that the politics and practices of commodification are complicated, contested and contingent. Having established that discourses of ethnicity are a key feature of the commodified food industry in the UK, the following section examines how these are inextricably produced, legitimised by and bound up with optimistic narratives of multicultural culinary culture.

4.3 Multicultural Food: the Palatable side of Identity

Chicken Tikka Massala 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 sauce was added to satisfy the desire of British people to have their meat served in gravy. (Robin Cook, 2001)

When the then British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook cited Chicken Tikka Massala (CTM) as a potent symbol and product of British multiculturalism, he did so as part of a larger argument attempting to counter anxieties, in the face of a changing population, closer ties with Europe and devolution, about the economic and cultural future of
Britain. CTM, in this context, becomes the narrative nursery food of the nation—cooked up to soothe fears about threatened identity and economic uncertainty. In his argument Cook locates multiculturalism as part of a historical British experience: 'The idea that Britain was a 'pure' Anglo-Saxon society before the arrival of communities from the Caribbean, Asia and Africa is a fantasy'. Next he argues that the pluralism of present day Britain is both an economic and cultural asset and a sign of the UK's success. 'Our lifestyles and cultural horizons have also been broadened in the process', he claims and CTM is the cultural symbol he chooses to illustrate this point. CTM, it would seem, is not just an inoffensively bland dish that lends itself perfectly to a microwave reheat, it is tied up with and integral to national, economic and cultural ideals.

The celebration of culinary ethnic diversity in Britain is not limited to Cook's political speech but is a repeated theme across a range of different mediums including, but not limited to, the popular press, city guide-books and the tourist board marketing strategies of some British cities with large 'ethnic' populations. As Cook et al note: [O]ne notable characteristic, chiming with broader discussions about the so-called 'rebranding of Britain' has been how these commentaries have increasingly broken from documenting a conservative defence of traditional British fare, instead noting the popularity of 'non-traditional' and 'foreign' foods, and making culinary and cultural diversity a distinguishing characteristic of contemporary Britishness. (Cook et al, 1999: 225)

A typical article in London's TimeOut magazine (17-24 July, 2002) organises London into five 'ethnic' areas and lists food shops and restaurants worth visiting. Titled 'Eat the World', the article is an explicit celebration of multicultural culinary culture:

We could have just, you know, congratulated London on its wonderful ethnic diversity. But then we started feeling a little peckish...London is one of the few places where you can savour the whole food culture of a distant land or people on your doorstep. (Diamond, 2002; 40)

---

6 This speech was given by Robin Cook to the Social Market Foundation in London, 19 April 2001. The speech followed a week of scandal after the refusal of then Conservative leader William Hague to publicly rebuke Conservative MPs declining to sign a Commission for Racial Equality pledge for all party members not to invoke race as part of the 2001 election campaign. For Cook, CTM served as both a useful metaphor and an effective means of gaining political mileage out of the Conservative party's difficulties. For a full account of the events that led up to the speech and extracts of the speech itself see http://www.guardian.co.uk/archive/article/0,4273,4173765,00.html and http://www.guardian.co.uk/racism/Story/0,2763,477023,00.html

7 See TimeOut guides to London and Jenny Linford's Food Lover's London, 1991

8 Birmingham and Leicester for example
Food in this article is used to encourage Londoners to explore the geography of their city and to examine the ‘ethnic’ identities of London’s population. The enthusiastic endorsement of cultural difference as a feature of contemporary multicultural society is similarly noted by social historian Christina Hardyment. In describing the ‘strengthening individual identity of Asian restaurants’ in the UK, she suggests that an emphasis on culinary difference is indicative of cultural tolerance: ‘(T)he answer to coping in a multicultural society is celebration of difference rather than obsessive integration; informed respect rather than grudging tolerance’ (Hardyment, 1995: 125).

The connection between multicultural food and optimistic accounts of multiculturalism derives from a number of assumptions about the symbolic and material nature of food practices. In thinking about why and how food is invoked in optimistic narratives about mutliculture it is useful to explore these assumptions further. First, food works as a metaphor for Robin Cook and others because, as I have noted, it is widely accepted that food, eating habits, food customs and food tastes reflect and define the cultures with which they are associated. On one level it is self evident that different cultures embrace different foods - what may be a delicacy for one culture may be a poison for another (Douglas 1970). Food, therefore, is often the primary focus for cultural suspicion and hostility between different groups. When the terms ‘Frog’, ‘Roast Beef’ and ‘Kraut’ are invoked to describe foreigners, ‘weird’ or ‘disgusting’ eating habits serve as the evidence for feelings of superiority and insider/outsider positions are established (see Kalcik, 1984). Food, therefore, is often experienced as the lived and everyday practice of social and cultural inequality. Renowned cookery book writer Claudia Roden, an Egyptian Jew who came to England in 1956, described the suspicion of the British when she decided to write a book about Middle Eastern food in the early 1960s:

Roden: When I was collecting, [recipes]9 people would say they couldn’t imagine that Middle Eastern food could be good. I mean they would say things like, ‘is it going to be sheep’s eyes and testicles?’ But em, also the idea was that people in the Middle East ate disgusting food, you know, they were people who

9 My transcripts are literal quotations but for the purposes of clarity and out of respect to narrators I have decided that where necessary their quotations may be slightly altered so as to eliminate some of the inconsistencies resulting from spoken dialogue, particularly for people for whom English is a second language. Claudia Roden, Perween Warsi, Rosamund Grant and Wing Yip all privately expressed anxiety about their accents and their command of the English language and I therefore believe that where their recordings are grammatically ‘incorrect’ it is appropriate to edit them without the meaning of their words being put in jeopardy.
were bare foot in the street and how could they eat anything that’s worth? Because certainly, em, there was no knowledge of it because in the past the British who travelled, had never wanted to eat the local food, certainly not in Egypt, certainly not in many countries. Also not many people travelled and so people didn’t expect something very good at all so it was only very gradually that the interest came....

This extract of Roden’s life story is a reminder of how food and identity are perceived as mutually constituting and how this relationship can be experienced as limiting and challenging. In this instance, assumptions about Middle Eastern food and a barely covered disgust for what is assumed will be ‘sheep’s eyes and testicles’, justify and bolster derogatory British attitudes towards the ‘bare foot’ people of the Middle East. The ‘bare feet’ here are reminders of the delicate connection between the ‘civilised body’ and food. If a ‘civilised body’ is clean, pure and self-contained the ‘bare feet’ represent the opposite in that they are close to nature and dirty. Significantly, the food the British imagine belongs to those ‘bare feet’ is feral – blood and guts – and, therefore, a symbolic connection is made between the (uncivilised) body of the Middle Eastern person and the food they ingest (Lupton, 1996: 19; Stallybrass & White, 1986).

Roden’s experience of the historical reluctance of the British to eat ‘foreign food’ is a reminder of how constructions of difference and hierarchy can be maintained as lived experience. Cultural hierarchies of exclusion in relation to food have nothing to do with taste as a physical experience and everything to do with taste as a mechanism of distinction that may be religious, cultural, classed etc (Bourdieu, 1984). Ignoring the boundaries of culturally inscribed ‘taste’ potentially threatens the status of the cater and, worse, risks contamination from the inside. As Falk argues:

10 Interview with Claudia Roden, born in Egypt 1936, cookery writer, recorded by Polly Russell, 1/2/01, Tape 7 Side A, C821/47/07
11 Roden’s story of her early experiences of British attitudes towards Middle Eastern food is one version of an oft repeated narrative account (see, for instance, Weale 1999). This does not invalidate the story or make it less significant but instead is a clear example of narrative identity, of ‘life as storied.’ In part the richness and meaning of life stories is revealed in the practice of repetition. As oral historian Samuel Schrager explains:

In the form that the oral historian is likely to encounter it, the story has already undergone the progressive structuring of detail that accompanies retellings. For those who think the purpose of an interview is to get beyond already-formed accounts to some deeper truth about the subject, this may seem discouraging. It should not be. An account’s previous tellings give it validity apart for the moment of the interview. If it belongs to the teller’s repertoire of narrative, it is grounded in his or her life and in the social life in which that life is lived (Schrager 1998: 284-285).

More specifically this account is bound up with Roden’s heroine narrative through which she legitimises and explains her career. This narrative is also a key indication of Roden’s high investment in culinary culture and her self positionning as both an agent and witness of change.

116
The sense of taste is surely there, but the 'judgement' is located primarily at the boundaries of the culture, in the 'mouth' of the community, as it were. Only when these boundaries grow weaker, is the judgement of taste transposed into the level of the individual self, body and mouth - still, however, related and conditioned by cultural representations. (Falk, 1994: 13)

For Robin Cook's evocation of food as a catalyst and symbol of conflating identities to work, therefore, the taboo potential of food has to be recognised. In other words, eating and accepting the food of another culture is symbolically significant because incorporation inevitably risks exposing the self to danger:

If one does not know what one is eating, one's subjectivity is called into question. It is not only the life and health of the eater that are challenged by the incorporation of food, but also that individual's place in culture. Thus the incorporation of the wrong type of substance may lead to contamination, transformation from within, a dispossession of the self. (Lupton, 1996: 17)

As a consequence, the daily act of eating, though often banal, is 'fraught with potentially irreversible consequences' (Fischler, 1988: 281). The hostility that Roden describes encountering when she talked about Egyptian Jewish food in the early 1960s encapsulates the anxiety associated with incorporation, especially when that incorporation involves crossing cultural boundaries.

Roden’s decision, therefore, to collect recipes from the Egyptian emigré community of London was fuelled by a personal and political mission to reject the stereotypes ascribed to her by British society:

_Polly: When you started collecting recipes in 1957 who were you collecting them for?_  
_Roden: Just for us, I never thought really that, I wasn’t thinking about a book. It was very, very personal and somehow a big labour of love. And at one point... I also wanted people to tell me about the circumstances of a recipe, what was behind that recipe, if it was for a festive occasion or if people had beliefs about it because I wanted to know, to record what life was about. One reason was that I felt nobody in Britain, I think that’s when I started thinking about publishing, nobody in Britain knew about the Middle East and in a way they had more contempt, if you said you came from Egypt they just didn’t think it was a place...so I just felt they’ve got to know something around the food otherwise why would they want to make those brown beans or anything?_12

---

12 Interview with Claudia Roden (2001) Tape 6 Side B, C821/47/06
For Roden, writing down the recipes of the Egyptian émigré community in London was imperative for different, though related, reasons. First, recipes enable Roden to preserve the cultural practices associated with a particular time (her childhood) and place (Egypt) in the context of forced emigration to Britain. Food becomes significant, therefore, at the point of displacement, the (forced) removal from one space to another. Food practices are ways that the social relations and practices of an 'old' space are remembered and reproduced in a new context. Writing down the recipes is a form of remembering and recording that pays testimony to her community's former place in the world at a time of great uncertainty. In other words, Jewish Egyptians could be removed from the Middle East but the Middle East could not be removed from them.¹³

Second, Roden slides from describing a motivation to write that might be understood as internal (writing for her community, her family, herself) to a motivation that might be understood as external (writing to alter the British view of Egyptians and the Middle East). By writing about the beliefs, folklore and rituals attached to different dishes, Roden is able to challenge the 'barefoot' image of the Middle East and in so doing make those 'brown beans' more palatable, an act which simultaneously writes her community into Britain on its own terms. Understood in this light, Roden's narrative corroborates Robin Cook's assertion about CTM. If a cultural suspicion of another's food ('foreign muck') is understood primarily as a suspicion of 'Others' and the threat to the 'natural' order they engender, it follows that eating the food of 'Others' is a symbol of cultural acceptance and exchange. Following this logic, therefore, the wide-scale and manifest interest in the foods of 'Others' in Britain is a relatively recent phenomenon and may well signify the breaking down of culturally inscribed taboos and a more fluid acceptance of difference.

The process Robin Cook describes, however, is not one of parallel cultures co-existing in an unchanged form. What Robin Cook's speech evokes is the dynamic 'melting pot' where the food, and by extension British identity, is 'changed' and 'altered' through the process of multi-culturalism. CTM, therefore, is simultaneously created by and creating

¹³ Roden was emphatic that during her childhood different religions co-existed peacefully in Egypt. She described in detail the contribution of the Jewish community to the economic and cultural life of the region. Recording the foods of the Middle East and mapping the influence of Jewish cuisine (Roden 1968, 1999) around the world has amounted to a life's work that is intimately tied up with her political ideals and dreams.
the British multi-cultural experience. The logic of Cook’s argument relies upon the symbolic function of food and, crucially, on the transformative function of food. On a purely biological level, the individual body depends on and is altered by food. ‘You are what you eat’ is literally true – our physiological selves are determined by what we incorporate. But the transformative function of food is not limited to the biological – food is symbolically transformative. A Muslim refuses to eat pork, not because it is unsafe physiologically as a food, but because it is unsafe symbolically and culturally. To eat pork for a Muslim would be to take the symbolically impure into the self and therefore, by association, to become impure/soiled/tainted as a result. And while transgressive acts of eating threaten to negatively transform the embodied self from the inside out, sanctioned incorporation may promise to spiritually enrich, cleanse or socially elevate (Lupton, 1996). Food’s literal and symbolic transformative function lies at the centre of optimistic narratives about food and multi-culturalism at a range of different scales. While Robin Cook cites CTM as part of a political speech defining British national identity, optimistic narratives of food multiculturalism can also be mobilised at a commercial and personal scale.

Robin Cook’s speech cites the fabrication and popularity of CTM as proof of an inclusive, accepting and changing Britain. British Indian food manufacturer Perween Warsi provides a similarly optimistic view but from a different perspective. Optimistic narratives of food and multiculturalism form an integral part of Warsi’s life story and her commercial practices. Warsi cites food, in particular Indian food, as a symbol and practice of change in Britain but from her perspective, that of a British Indian Muslim, the change is more active than Cook’s rather passive ‘absorbing’ and ‘adapting’ description suggests. The difference here is slight but significant, indicating how cultural changes relating to food might be viewed and presented from the perspective of a minority culture rather than from the perspective of the dominant culture (as presented by Robin Cook) (Narayan, 1995). Perween Warsi, listed as one of the UK’s wealthiest Asians,14 is the Managing Director of S&A Foods, a company with a turnover of over £100 million employing over 1,300 people. S&A Foods manufacturers predominantly ‘ethnic’ food for the British retail supermarket sector. The transformative potential of food is central to the optimistic narrative about British multicultural identity that is

14 Source the Xpress Rich List http://www.zindagee.co.uk/richlist.htm
bound up with Warsi’s commercial enterprise. When asked about the significance of the popularity of Indian food in Britain, Warsi responded in the following way:

Warsi: I think one of the contributions that people from other races, other countries have bought are these contributions - we have, the way I say it, brought spice in people’s lives, we have really brought the flavours into British lifestyle where it was very traditional food and that’s it. And I remember when I was invited by one of my husband’s consultants for dinner and I went there very excited going to a British person’s house to see what we eat and so on. And beautifully laid the table with beautiful tablecloth and silver cutlery and beautiful china and crockery and whatever and then came the roast chicken which was fine, yes, that was good and then (laughs) and then came boiled carrots and boiled peas and boiled potatoes and I was just sitting myself and just thinking ‘is that all we’re going to have, just boiled stuff’. Because in Indian culture you have very rich food, especially when you have invited somebody special then you have even richer food and I was just amazed and I just could not believe and my mind just would not accept that you could feed guests that you had invited for the first time boiled potatoes and peas which is then that I learned that is how you served food with a main item and some peas and I accepted that and quite enjoy it from time to time. So yes it’s very different, but that’s what we brought in, we brought the richness we brought the colour if you look the dresses, not just food, I like observing these things, like jewellery...there is a lot of changes we have brought in which are positive not negative into this country.15

In this excerpt Warsi’s assertion that immigrants have ‘brought spice’ to British culture is argued via a historical recollection of her early experiences in Britain. In her description Britain is somewhere where the food is ‘traditional’ and ‘boiled’ and, by inference, dull, despite the formal and elaborate table settings. From this we get a different perspective on Cook’s assertion that British culture ‘adapts’ and ‘alters’ when presented with something new. In Warsi’s life story the power to effect change is emphasised over the power to absorb. While some cultural theorists, as discussed below, have criticised mainstream (white) interest in the cultural artefacts and food practices of ‘others’ as a form of culinary imperialism (Heldke, 1993; hooks, 1992), the process understood from Warsi’s perspective might be understood as a form of reverse colonisation. Warsi’s life story provides a means of considering the significance of ‘ethnic’ food in the UK from ‘the point of view of immigrants to Western contexts, rather than that of mainstream western citizens’ (Narayan, 1995: 76). Both the language and delivery of this excerpt - the conspiratorial laugh when she describes the ‘boiled stuff’ of British food and the ‘richness’, ‘colour’ and ‘contributions’ of Indian food and

15 Interview with Perween Wari, born in Bihar India 1956, food manufacturer, recorded by Polly Russell, 28/6/00, Tape 1 Side A, C821/37/01
culture - establish the old Britain as somewhere strange, amusing and in need of change. Warsi’s description and claim are both explicit and implicit. Explicitly the food (and clothes and jewellery) of the dominant culture have improved because of the material influences of Indian immigrant cultures in Britain. Implicitly this is not just about food - Warsi slides seamlessly from a question about the popularity of Indian food into a description and defence, via foodways, about cultural identity and immigration in Britain. When Warsi talks about ‘British lifestyle’ and how it has been changed, for the better, by Indian culture, the difference is not just a change of menus, it is a change of identity from something ‘dull’ and ‘boiled’ to something ‘flavourful’ and exciting. In this extract food is thus bound up with changing identity at a range of scales from the individual, the group and the nation.

Warsi’s account of the dinner party is the anecdotal vehicle for her optimistic multi-cultural vision and message. Moreover, Warsi’s commercial success as a manufacturer of Indian food for mainstream British retailers is inextricably connected, legitimised and explained through the repetition of the dinner party story. Warsi’s version of Indian food in Britain situates immigrants, and therefore herself, in Britain culturally and commercially and also attaches a symbolic importance to the commercial practice of manufacturing ‘ethnic’ food. If the lives of the British have been ‘spiced up’ by the ‘contributions’ of people from ‘other countries’, it follows that commercially manufacturing ‘ethnic’ food is an important cultural practice and certainly not one that Warsi wants associated with any problematic politics of race. When asked to comment on whether in practice a multi-cultural food industry has any beneficial effect on race relations, Warsi was uncomfortable and seemingly defensive:

Polly: Some critics would say although that is true it doesn’t mean that people of other cultures and races are more accepted. What would you say about that?
Warsi: I think it comes back to individuals... The people I have dealt with, the people I worked with, the people who have worked with me, have been fantastic. I have not faced a single issue of racism myself, people are very supportive, encouraging and helpful but people are individuals and that exists in every country not just this county, it happens but I think when it comes to food and dresses and the way you dress up these things, are the things that bring you together. We go out with local friends and when you sit down and eat you start thinking about what goes in it, what’s the culture of the place and what else goes on and how do you celebrate and you start to get to know each other and you start to get to share each other’s positives and negatives and thinking and different cultures’ different habits what you may like, I don’t and what you
approve, I don’t and vice versa and I think these things indirectly helps all of us to come together and get closer to each other and know each other which helps in our relationships whatever relationship you look at.\textsuperscript{16}

Warsi’s assertion that racism is simply a matter of individual choice fails to acknowledge the structural and historical dimensions of racial inequality. In her narrative, individuals rather than structures, institutions, groups or nations are imagined, but definitely not experienced, as racist. Warsi uses the setting of a restaurant to glide over the uncomfortable topic of racism. Food, according to Warsi’s response, is a crucial thread that ties differences together but this explanation shows a significant shift from her previous robust description of how people ‘from other races’ have ‘changed’ British culture. This later version is tempered by the uncomfortable mention of racism and seems, therefore, much more restrained and qualified – suddenly tolerance and understanding, rather than cultural change, are the goals.

Despite the fact that optimistic multicultural food metaphors rely upon the potential threat of taboo and transgression, Warsi does not acknowledge the sometimes problematic politics of food’s association with race and ethnicity. By contrast, for Jenny Linford, a freelance food writer, food consultant and author of two cookery/guide books (Linford, 1991, 2000), the pleasure of being open to diverse foods is inextricably linked with the problematic lived experience of the politics of race and ethnicity. Linford’s two books, \textit{Food Lover’s London} and \textit{A Taste of London} are gourmet guides to food shopping in London, expressly designed to introduce readers to different cultural and culinary communities in the city. In a sense, therefore, Linford’s books might be understood as overt celebrations of multiculturalism, but in talking to Linford the ambiguities of the lived practice of multicultural identity emerged as a central theme in her life story. Linford was brought up in Singapore, England and Italy and has a British father and Singaporean mother. While talking about her memories of Singapore compared with those of living in England, Linford remembers ‘a very diverse spectrum of people and it wasn’t a barrier like it is in England’ where ‘there are these barriers, invisible barriers but they exist’.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} Interview with Perween Warsi (2000) Tape 1 Side A, C821/37/01
\textsuperscript{17} Interview with Jenny Linford, born in Singapore 1963, cookery writer/freelance journalist, recorded by Polly Russell 1.8.00, Tape 1 Side A, C821/38/01
In the following excerpt, Linford describes, for example, how she perceives the complexities of her own Eurasian identity and in so doing food becomes part of her personal strategy to maintain her Singaporean identity for herself and her son, Ben:

Linford: I think being Eurasian is really odd because, um, because I don't have a language, we were brought up speaking English so there wasn't like there was another language and culture... we were just very mixed up, it was very confusing really. I think being Eurasian is confusion, and I think coming to England made it worse. I always had this thing when I was in Singapore I felt English, and when I was in England I didn't feel I was English in so many ways. I mean when I went to University I read English and Politics at York and this girl said to me 'oh, you're not all English are you' and I said 'no, I'm reading politics too' and she said 'no that wasn't what I meant' (laughs). But I just thought that was what she meant. Now I feel much calmer about it - when I was growing up it was always 'who am I?'. I think being mixed race is very complicated but I sort of really want Ben to know things about Singaporean food and I just think food is a great in to different cultures and I just want him to be open-minded about food and try different food. So there's this thing called blachan which is this really smelly fish paste that you use to make curry paste and Ben is really sweet because he just loves learning about, you know we cook together, and if he's up in bed while I'm cooking curry paste Chris will be in the corner gagging because he can't bear the smell and Ben will shout down 'are you cooking with blachan?' So when you go to Singapore that's the smell, this really fishy, pungent smell that to English nostrils is really disgusting but I want him to be acclimatised so it's not something that's horrible and is something that's familiar.18

In talking about the difficulty of her ethnicity, Lindford's account telescopes from Singapore via England to the description of an intimate moment of food preparation in her daily family life. In her account, cooking dried shrimp paste at home in Barnet, North London takes Linford and her son on a metaphorical journey to the streets of Singapore where the smell of blachan hangs in the air. The scales at work here are significant. When Linford cooks 'blachan' for her family, she reminds her son of her identity and her past and attempts to prepare him for a future where he will be 'open minded about food and try different food' because food is a 'great in' to different cultures. Food acts as a vehicle for 'jumping', or perhaps joining, seemingly disparate scales. Neil Smith's descriptions of homelessness and strategies of political empowerment uses the metaphor 'jumping scales' to explain the means by which people 'organise the production and reproduction of daily life and to resist oppression and exploitation at higher scales' (Smith, 1993: 90). In a sense the everydayness of cooking

18 Interview with Jenny Linford (2000), Tape 1 Side B, C821/38/01
provides a means through which Linford connects and negotiates the relation of her embodied identity to the politics of the home and the nation.

That food can serve to connect is noted by Fischler when he states, ‘not only does the eater incorporate the properties of food, but, symmetrically, it can be said that the absorption of a food incorporates the eater into a culinary system and therefore into the group which practices it...’ (1988: 280-281). Through cooking and incorporation, therefore, Linford binds her son to her, and therefore, to his own, complicated identity. In this light it is likely that Linford’s books are as much about how the ‘barriers’ that she experiences might be resisted or challenged through strategies of consumption that afford ownership and knowledge of place, as they are an explicit celebration of multiculture.

Unlike Cook’s political speech and Warsi’s personal and commercial narrative, Linford’s narrative accommodates the potential pleasure as well as danger, ambiguity and politics of multicultural food. Being Eurasian, she explains, is ‘complicated’ and has caused her some anxiety in the past. On the one hand her being singled out at university and her experience of ‘invisible barriers’ are negative experiences of her ‘different’ ethnicity. On the other, Linford wants to find a way of presenting and protecting her difference through her work as a food writer and through everyday practices such as cooking for her son. The ambiguities of living with and through difference are vividly conjured up when Linford describes cooking smells so violent that her husband is described as ‘retching’ while son and mother enjoy an intimate exchange. Linford’s recounting of this everyday event connects her with a complex personal ethnic identity and history. Being Eurasian, according to Linford, is complicated and layered as well as being difficult to define from within and to recognise from outside. Her knowledge and practice of cooking Singaporean food and commercial explorations of cultural culinary diversity stand in for the ‘language’ she lacks. Fischler suggests that, ‘Food makes the eater: it is therefore natural that the eater should try to make himself by eating’ (Fischler, 1988: 288). By cooking Singaporean food for her family and writing about food Linford reminds her family and the wider public who she is – Linford (re)produces herself not so much through eating as through different forms of reflexive and thoughtful food production. Linford’s engagement with different cultures’ foodways, as indicated by her professional achievements and her hopes for her son, are
clearly personally motivated. In other words, Linford is personally and professionally invested in using food as an ‘in to different cultures’ in part because she knows that food is a great ‘in’ to her own sense of self.

Robin Cook’s speech and Warsi’s and Linford’s narratives suggest how optimistic narratives connecting food with multiculturalism can be mobilised across a range of (related) scales. Robin Cook’s political and public speech invokes a celebratory narrative of food and multiculturalism to define British identity and Britain’s political and economic future and so is inextricably bound up with how imaginings of the nation are produced. Warsi invokes a similar narrative of optimism to describe the benefits of immigration for Britain and to tie the commercial aims of her business with positive cultural changes. Warsi’s mobilisation of optimistic narratives of multiculturalism thus connects imaginings of an improved nation with specific commercial practices and with her embodied Indian ethnicity. Linford’s narrative, meanwhile, engages with positive notions of diversity but also acknowledges the ambiguities, limitations and politics of difference. Linford’s professional work and everyday relations are intricately and inextricably bound up with her own personal sense of identity and belonging. Culinary multiculture thus connects Linford both to the pleasures and discomforts of her lived experiences of ethnicity, binding her to the home, the nation and the world. These various accounts demonstrate how optimistic multi-cultural narratives surrounding food are connected to national, commercial and personal narratives as well as lived daily experience.

4.4 ‘Ethnic’ Food – the Site of Cultural Colonisation

Bearing no genuine provenance, the dish now appears in many different guises in restaurants around the country ... whatever the precise description, it all remains short hand for one thing: “innocuous curry”. All of which makes it particularly fascinating that the chicken tikka masala (sic), and by extension the India restaurant in general, should be selected to provide a cultural capsule of Britain today. After all, the great British curry house is still modelled on a design that owners a couple of decades ago thought reflected what the British thought of India. Minarets for the exotic touch, pub-style velour seats for recognisable comfort...who are we kidding? Genuine multiculturalism this isn’t. (Wahhab, 2000)
In his written reply to Robin Cook’s claim that CTM is a ‘capsule’ of British multiculturalism, Iqbal Wahhab, a successful Indian restaurateur and one-time editor of *Tandoori* magazine, objects to the ‘un-Indianness’ of typical curry houses. In so doing Wahhab overlooks Cook’s point that CTM is the symbol of Indian and British cultures merging. For Cook, presumably, the ‘velour seats’ and ‘minarets’ decorating a ‘traditional’ Indian restaurant would be seen as positive signs of the blending process of multiculturalism in Britain. But if Wahhab fails to directly address these aspects of Cook’s argument, his objections to Cook’s celebratory version of CTM nevertheless provide an alternative perspective on multicultural culinary culture. Wahhab’s article suggests that optimistic understandings of multicultural culinary culture may ignore, by design or omission, the complicated and often uneven politics of identity at play in these processes. This oversight, moreover, is not only a characteristic of political rhetoric. In detailing the proliferation of imported tropical produce to Western Europe by tracking the flow of foods from one culture to another (in itself a problematic construction that overstates the bounded fixity of places and practices), historian Yves Pehaut claims that a reason ‘for the popularity of imported fruits and vegetables is no doubt the fact that many Europeans and Americans have visited the tropics and developed a fondness for the bountiful gifts of nature found there’ (Pehaut, 1999: 469). Pehaut makes no mention of tropical food producers or the context of production and consequently implies that tropical produce is just ‘there’ rather than laboured for. The world is thus imagined as a culinary Eden for Western consumers: ‘Consumers can now take comfort in the fact that the whole world is their garden’ (Pehaut, 1999: 470).

The failure to acknowledge or question the complex politics of multi-cultural global food industries in the West has been noted by a number of cultural and culinary theorists (Goldman, 1992; Narayan, 1995). Heldke (1993), for example, proposes strategies for ‘anti-colonialist eating’ as a means of counteracting the ‘colonialist stance’ of some Americans who display their cultural capital by eating ‘ethnic’ food while taking little interest in this food’s cultural or historical contexts. Describing the economic and material consequences of low priced ‘ethnic’ food production Heldke states:

They open restaurants where all members of the family work long hours, seven days a week. Yet we who eat in these restaurants often remain deliberately ignorant of these conditions....We happily pay the low bills – leave poor tips besides. That is, our cultural colonialist behaviour has material consequences as well. (Heldke, 1993 quoted in Narayan 1995: 77)
Heldke's notion of culinary cultural colonialist consumption and Wahhab's contention that the Indian culture presented in a curry house and represented by CTM is appropriated by and subsumed beneath dominant British culture reflects an anxiety articulated by cultural critic bell hooks (1992). In this section I examine narratives of multicultural culinary culture and hooks' descriptions of the commodification of ethnicity in conjunction with extracts from two food producers. This illustrates how the politics of food and ethnicity can be narrated and experienced as unequal, complex and restrictive and will serve as a counterbalance to the various versions of celebratory narratives of culinary culture discussed in the previous section.

According to hooks, mass culture and commodification threatens to 'consume' difference. For hooks, 'The over-riding fear is that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate - that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten' (hooks, 1992: 39). hooks contends that the commodification of difference, of which the popularity of 'ethnic' food in Britain may be one example, does not challenge the hegemonic order: 'To make one's self vulnerable to the seduction of difference, to seek an encounter with the Other, does not require that one relinquish forever one's mainstream positionality' (hooks, 1992: 23). According to hooks the processes of cultural colonisation enable the dominant in society to have their cake and eat it. Recent historical evidence of multicultural eating appears to corroborate hooks' view (see, for instance, Burton, 1993 for an account of colonial food in India). As Narayan describes, British held prejudices about Indians were not transformed by the phenomenon of Indian food in Britain in the early '70s and '80s:

While curry may have been incorporated with ease into British cuisine, 'the desire to assimilate and possess what is external to the self' did not extend to the actual people of Indian origin, whose arrival into English society resulted in a national dyspepsia, whose most pronounced symptoms were Enoch Powell and the National Front, and the development of the pastime of 'Paki-bashing, a sport now as English as cricket. (Narayan, 1995: 72)

Narayan describes a contradictory landscape where the appreciation and enjoyment of Indian food co-exists with discriminatory and racist political discourse and racist behaviour. The identity politics at play in the production and consumption of 'foreign'
food in Britain are not, therefore, encapsulated by optimistic narratives of multicultural culinary culture.

In the following extract, for example, entrepreneur and restaurateur Alan Yau, a second generation Hong Kong Chinese immigrant to Britain, describes the experience of working at his parents' Chinese takeaway in Wisbech in the late 1970s:

Polly: Can you give me a particular example of an encounter with someone?
Yau: You know they tend to tell you these racist jokes and expect you to laugh. The worst ones tend to be after eleven. They tend to come in small groups, very loud. One pissed in front of the counter and some would tell you racist jokes and expect you to laugh with them and if you didn't laugh they would get angry and say 'what's your problem mate?' That sort of thing and then the abuse was 'you stupid fucking chink.' You know, this sort of thing, it's not nice, it's not nice.'
Polly: How did you cope with that or handle that?
Yau: You just keep your head down or pretend that nothing happened and try to process the order as quickly as possible. Yes, that's it. But you know it's kind of ruined, emotionally, it's kind of ruined the whole night. I always said in terms of the food business I don't mind the hard work but what's hard is that sort of thing.\(^{19}\)

Yau's description provides an illustration of how the politics of 'otherness' are experienced in everyday food practices. Yau's account encapsulates the potential paradox of food as a site for cultural exchange and renders laughable the notion that the incorporation of a different nation's food presupposes an acceptance or appreciation of difference. Here, the supposed relationship between food and identity (in this case Chinese food served by Chinese people to white English customers) is used to bolster the status of the 'pissed' customers. This extract is a reminder that where there are ethnic and racial hierarchies in place, there is always the potential for hegemonic power to assert itself. The desire of those 'pissed' customers to eat Chinese food was probably determined by economics, geography and lack of choice\(^{20}\) rather than any desire to engage with either Chinese cuisine or Chinese people. I think, however, that the need to denigrate Yau and his family may have been inextricably related to the discomfort felt by those abusive customers for having to incorporate the 'strange' food of 'strange

\(^{19}\) Interview with Alan Yau, born Hong Kong, 1963, restaurateur, recorded by Polly Russell 3.5.01 Tape 5 Side A, C821/61/5

\(^{20}\) Alan Yau's parents moved to Wisbech in the late 70s. At that time Wisbech was a small town and Yau's family were the only Chinese people who lived there. Characteristically, Chinese takeaways in small towns in the late 70s would be open after the pubs closed, located close to the pub and, compared to more traditional restaurants, would be inexpensive. For a historical account of the Chinese food business in Britain see Driver, 1983 pp73-97.
foreigners'. In other words eating, in this case, Chinese food, inescapably involves a symbolic exchange which risks upsetting the hegemonic power structure. The potential threat to the inscribed power structure is symbolically averted by the abhorrent behaviour which re-establishes a hierarchy which is both economically (Chinese people serving and reliant on customers’ money) and racially (‘Chinks’, ‘racist jokes’) inscribed.

In the extract from Yau’s life story the site of food production and exchange (the Chinese takeaway) becomes the focus for the direct expression and experience of explicit prejudice. Unsurprisingly, Yau was reluctant to work in the food industry once he had finished his education: ‘I thought I would rather go and work for someone else and go and have a better social life and where I would be treated as an equal and also where the working entity doesn’t tie down the entire family unit.’ Describing himself at the time, Yau said he was a ‘very sad and desperate immigrant exposed to lots of racial abuse, to a kid who desperately wanted to be white, to a kid who saw education as the only way out of the both the economic and the cultural dilemma...’. The Chinese food that Yau and his family cook is the symbol of their Chinese ‘otherness’ and at this time Yau dreams of being ‘white’, of being treated ‘as an equal’, a fantasy that cannot be envisaged within the scope of the Chinese food industry or as an ethnically inscribed Chinese person. Chinese food is an integral part of how Yau is externally perceived and so getting out of the Chinese food industry is crucial if he wants to escape from the limits of a supposed/imposed ethnicity.

Yau’s descriptions of his early experiences of one sector of the ‘ethnic’ food market suggest that the notions of choice, mobility and freedom that are implicit in optimistic narratives associated with multicultural culinary culture are not compatible with the unequal social relations that they, in part, produce. Describing her attitudes towards food Rosamund Grant, a first generation Guyanese restaurateur and cookery writer makes a clear connection, for instance, between stereotypes of Caribbean food and racial inequality:

Grant: I think Europeans tend to see Caribbean food in a particular way and they would say it’s akee and salt fish, rice and peas and curried goat and mutton and

---

21 Interview with Alan Yau (2001), Tape 5 Side A C821/61/05
22 Interview with Alan Yau (2001), Tape 4 Side B C821/61/4
da-de-da-de-da they’ve got particular things. And people say to me ‘oh, you know I like spicy food’ and by that they mean pepper or they don’t like spicy food but I say you can have the spice without the pepper, I like people to be clear about how they think about it because they stereotype it and all Caribbean food is spicy and, do you know what I mean, and all of it is akee and saltfish or you know so I try and broaden out people’s way of thinking. So if I'm going to cook for a European crowd, or people who want to eat Caribbean food, you know, I will, some of what I’ve got over the years is, urn, you know, ‘don’t put so much pepper in it or can we have Caribbean stew?’ Well ok I say ‘what is Caribbean stew?’ ‘cos there lots of Caribbean stew so I’m quite challenging... Caribbean stew is not one generic thing, it can be all sorts of different things, you know.

Polly: Why is that important to you?
It’s important to me because I hate stereotyping, I hate being put in a box (laughs), I hate being limited, I hate being seen through the eyes of Europeans, I don’t like defining myself through the eyes of somebody who’s white or who is European. I have my own definition of myself and I think that is really important for me as a black woman to make an impression in that field because this is my field you know, and because I suppose there’s a lot of passionate feeling left over from slavery and the impact of slavery and migration and the displacement and all that kind of stuff and I just think ok it’s time to speak for ourselves so I will define who I am so I will define what I’m cooking and it’s not that I’m closed about that but I feel that we have been put into a box and we have been closed in and hello folks we are here and this is what we are about, you know it’s that and so it does irritate me when people talk about exotic food because exotic through whose perspective, is it mine or someone else’s?23

Running throughout Grant’s extract is a resistance to being categorised ‘in a particular way’, ‘being limited’ or ‘put in a box’. Cooking provides Grant with a means of controlling her representation and ‘challenging’ the unequal fixity of identity. Grant’s account encapsulates many of the complexities of the relationship between food and identity. On the one hand Grant’s narrative suggests that food is both a symbol and practice of her Guyanese identity. But because she perceives that there is a direct relationship between her food and her Guyanese-ness, this relationship is subject to colonisation and re-interpretation by different, perhaps more powerful, discourses and social practices.

When prompted to explain her objection to European simplifications of Caribbean food, Grant connects this process with slavery, migration and displacement. Grant thus mobilises food as a means of explaining how her personal politics are historically situated. Grant recognises that an interest in ‘foreign’ foods does not inevitably imply an

23 Interview with Rosamund Grant, born Guyana 1956, cookery writer/restaurateur/psychoanalyst, recorded by Polly Russell, 9.1.01, Tape 12 Side A, C821/35/9
equality of power or the full recognition of the ‘foreigners’ who the food serves to signify, on their own terms. bell hooks contends, for example, that:

Currently, the commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other’s history through a process of decontextualisation. (hooks, 1992: 32)

Grant’s anger about the simplified understanding of Caribbean food by Europeans is fuelled by the connection she makes between this, the elimination of black history and the elimination of black people through slavery, poverty and displacement. The lumping together of Caribbean food into one oversimplified form signifies for Grant a cultural denial of the complexity of her community’s historical context. If there is just one version of ‘Caribbean stew’ it follows that there must be one version, and to Grant’s mind a white version, of Caribbean identity, history and culture.

For Grant, this is not just a problem of oversimplification but a problem of point of view – a question of whose discourse Grant and her community are subject to/subjected by and forced to exist within. Food is the tool with which Grant influences how the Caribbean community, and by extension herself, are perceived from the outside by the white or European community. Food is one of the ways Grant can remind the world that ‘hello folks we are here’. But Grant also understands that the signification of her Caribbean identity through food can be a double-edged sword, particularly as she cannot always be in control of how she or her community are perceived. Grant’s discomfort with how she and her community are externally positioned is encapsulated in her rejection of the term ‘exotic’. Grant’s irritation with the term highlights how the power to define is distributed unequally, especially when that definition implies an ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ to which a person or group is associated, positioned and subjected. As Grant asks, ‘whose perspective, is it, mine or someone else’s?’ When food practices are signified as being ‘ethnic’ or ‘exotic’ as part of political and personal discourse and through the daily practices of food production, the groups with whom these practices are associated are themselves, by discursive association, positioned as ‘ethnic’ and ‘exotic’.
4.5 Different Engagements with Difference

Both Yau and Grant’s descriptions of the politics and practices of producing ‘ethnic’ food bring into question optimistic narratives of multicultural culinary culture and provide different lived examples of the theories of culinary colonialism proposed by hooks, Heldke and others. I suggest, however, that both optimistic and pessimistic readings of multicultural culinary culture are ultimately reductive and reify identity as fixed in ways that cannot account for the lived experience of food production and food producer identity. In the following section I cite extracts from two life stories that suggest the ways that individuals are able, with different degrees of reflexivity, to engage with thresholds of difference in their daily lives.

In arguing for the significance of moments when individuals act as agents of their own identity and move between established cultural boundaries, it is helpful to return momentarily to hooks. In describing the problems associated with the commodification of difference hooks argues that:

[the commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes the spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture. (hooks, 1992: 21)]

hooks contends that the pleasure of commodifying ‘others’ is exclusively enjoyed by the white mainstream. hooks suggests that ‘consumer cannibalism’ inevitably involves a displacing and decontextualising and is, therefore, ideologically unacceptable. Her argument, however, presupposes a rigid trajectory of white hegemonic power imposing meaning upon ‘Others’ and fails to recognise the multiple flows and practices of production and consumption. The counterbalance to hooks’ position, meanwhile, is the optimistic multicultural perspective encapsulated by the CTM metaphor. Aside from failing to acknowledge the unequal politics of representation and their material effects, this position also ignores the ways that the tastes of British culture have been appropriated by ‘others’ in Britain. Both negative and positive narratives, therefore, are subject to their own limitations – by setting up the process of ‘Othering’ with such a fixed, one-way movement, either negatively or positively, they fail to account for the complex potential of identity and in so doing reify the essentialist structure they seek to critique, albeit as part of different theoretical agendas.
A more complicated reading of the relationship between food and identity is undertaken by Uma Narayan’s exploration of her Indian community and family. Narayan argues that theories focusing on the decontextualising effects of the commodification of ‘Others’ fail to recognise that, ‘most of us are not only ignorant about the historical and cultural contexts of the food of Others, but equally ignorant about our own (Narayan, 1995: 77). Narayan states her concern with over stating the ‘white’/‘other’ polemic in the following way:

I worry that this tendency leads to ‘the West’ and to ‘mainstream Whites’ retaining an overwhelming centrality in these discussions, a centrality that appears both problematic and anachronistic at the same time when conflicts between members of different minority ‘ethnic groups’ appear with increasing frequency. (Narayan, 1995: 79)

The limitation of understanding the process of ‘Othering’ as the exclusive domain of white hegemonic power and the prevalent feature of consumption in Western societies is two fold. First, it reinstates a black/white essentialist dialectic, and second it simultaneously ignores the hierarchical and exclusionary politics existing within and between the boundaries of different ‘Others’.

Put simply, ‘others have others’, ‘others’ can and do eat the food of ‘others’. Crossing boundaries, therefore, is not exclusively available to the mainstream. The threshold between danger and pleasure alluded to by hooks and discursively acknowledged by positive multicultural readings that contain/dilute the dangers and inequalities of difference are, in highly subjective ways, actively engaged with by individuals at different times. In spending time with food producers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and involved in diverse areas of food production, I found that there were moments of what I would term ‘transgressive’ pleasure narrated about the experience of incorporating or producing ‘Other’s’ foods. Deepak Sharma, for instance, a British Indian Hindu who works as a senior food buyer for Marks & Spencer, repeatedly made reference while recording his life story to his strongly held Hindu beliefs. He talked about going to India on a pilgrimage, books he was reading about Hindu history and the daily rituals of worship. Sharma’s enthusiasm for his Hindu beliefs meant that after one interview he drove me across London to see the recently completed Neasden Hindu temple with which he was proud to be associated. During this drive we started talking about a product development trip he had taken to New York to source new products for
M&S. On this trip he was accompanied by a woman product developer and self-confessed gourmet, April Preston. Sharma, who started his career as an M&S clothes buyer has, by his own admission, no particular interest in food. While describing his visit to New York he said he had escaped a few times to have a Big Mac. When I expressed surprise and asked him how eating a beef burger sat with his Hindu beliefs he said, grinning all the while, he felt guilty about it but that he loved McDonald’s, ‘the taste, the whole atmosphere, the whole thing.’ Moreover, if Sharma’s admission appeared inconsistent with his professed religious beliefs and, in fact, the journey we were taking across London to the temple, it was perfectly consistent with the ‘boy racer’ elements of his identity – his new BMW, his fashionable clothes and his reflexive awareness of being a young, urban and modern consumer. I suspect Sharma told me about eating in McDonald’s because he wanted to demonstrate that he was at liberty to play at the boundaries of his identity - even as we were driving towards the Hindu temple - and as such make it clear that he has the necessary cultural and economic capital to ‘step over the line’ if he wants. As I detail later in chapters on narratives of domesticity and authenticity, Sharma is adept at mobilising, ‘enclaving’ and ‘diverting’ aspects of his identity at different times and in different spaces.

In the case of Shezad Hussain, a British Pakistani food consultant for M&S, her descriptions of cooking ‘traditional British’ dinner party food at her home in the early 1980s suggested a similar, if less risky, flirtation with the margins of mainstream culture and British class structures:

Hussain: My mother used to teach me to cook on Sundays but I didn’t actually enjoy it then but I enjoyed experimenting, trying different things. And when I wasn’t so involved with cooking Pakistani or Indian cooking I used to enjoy making roasts and things and a good hors d’oeuvres. I took it for granted that every good housewife could do a good curry but I thought this is more expert and I would cook things like salmon and cream and parsley all these different things and think this is real stuff – curry is ok but I can do a curry any time like mum does, like everyone does but this is really nice and I really want to experiment with food so I would even cook beef Wellington and wrap the pastry round it to impress my guests.

24 Conversation with Deepak Sharma noted in research diary 22nd November 2000.
25 In associating McDonald’s with transgression tinged pleasure, Sharma’s confession is reminiscent of Marie Gillespie’s description of young Punjabis’ taste for McDonald’s in Southall being bound up with performances of cultural capital or ‘cultural cool’ (Gillespie, 1995).
26 Interview with Shezad Hussain, born in Pakistan 1952, cookery writer/food consultant, recorded by Polly Russell, 30/8/00, Tape 4 Side A C821/36/04
In this extract Hussain hints at her rejection of her mother's cooking lessons, taught as preparation for life as a dutiful Muslim wife and mother. Instead, Hussain finds solace in 'experimenting' with 'traditional' British food, a practice which does not risk overturning inscribed gender roles but allows her to feel a degree of freedom and creativity. Both Sharma and Hussain, in different ways and with different degrees of reflexivity, thus derive feelings of pleasure and power by appropriating 'Other', even taboo, food practices into their everyday lives. Food thus provides a range of people, both 'mainstream' and 'Other', at different times and in different ways, with a means of inhabiting the boundaries of ethnic and cultural identity. This suggests that food's relation to identity is fluid, contextual and historical and cannot be aptly encapsulated by either optimistic or pessimistic narratives of multicultural culinary culture. But I would also suggest that beyond the possible pleasures discussed above, maintaining, controlling, emphasising and transgressing across the boundaries of food and identity can serve commercial ends for individuals involved in food production. By invoking Appadurai's terms 'enclaving' and 'diversion' in conjunction with food producer life stories, I now want to explore further the opportunities and limitations made possible by culinary culture and, more specifically, associations between food and ethnicity.

4.6 The Possibilities of 'Diversion' and 'Enclaving'

As I have noted, both optimistic and pessimistic accounts of multicultural culinary culture rely on identity 'difference' as an essential and given phenomenon. hooks, for example, does not provide a critical examination of the notion of difference itself, but a concern about hierarchies of difference and also an anxiety about commodification. As Peter Jackson has noted, commerce and commodification have long been associated with things, people and spaces being debased, soiled and ruined while, by contrast, non-commercial spheres are imagined as being associated with meaning and creativity (Jackson, 2002: 4). Appadurai's description of the life of things suggests that objections to commodification may overstate the boundaries between commodified and non-commodified realms. In applying the terms 'enclave' and 'divert' to people rather than things I hope to unsettle the boundaries between commerce and culture, as well as provide an evocative means of describing food's relation to ethnicity as a complex and contradictory process.
Appadurai’s discussion of the different phases in the lives of commodities contends that things can, over the course of their life span, be removed from or placed into commoditized realms through strategies of ‘enclaving’ or ‘diversion’:

Diversion, that is, may sometimes involve the calculated and ‘interested’ removal of things from an enclaved zone to one where exchange is less confined and more profitable, in some short-term sense. Where enclaving is usually in the interests of groups, especially the politically and economically powerful groups in any society, diversion is frequently the recourse of the entrepreneurial individual. But whether it is groups or individuals who are involved in either kind of activity, the central contrast is that whereas enclaving seeks to protect certain things from commoditization, diversion frequently is aimed at drawing protected things into the zone of commoditization. (Appadurai, 1986: 25-26)

According to Appadurai, processes of ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’ will determine the value of any particular thing at any particular time. To clarify these terms I will apply them, somewhat fictionally, to the life story of the sundried tomato. Appadurai describes an enclaved zone as one that is removed or distanced from commerce. Let us imagine that sundried tomatoes, prior to the 1980s, existed in Italy as a home-grown, home-dried, home-consumed food, unavailable commercially and thus existing in an ‘enclaved’ zone. A ‘diverted’ zone is a commodified zone. To ‘divert’ an object would mean moving it from a less or non-commodified zone into a more commodified zone. Back to the sundried tomatoes which, for the purposes of this description, have been discovered by a British gourmet food buyer scouring Italy for products. The sundried tomatoes are imported to the UK and sold in a few specialist food shops. Sun-dried tomatoes have been ‘diverted’ from an ‘enclaved’ zone into a commoditized zone. There are, however, different degrees of commoditization. When sundried tomatoes are made available in supermarkets across the UK they have been ‘diverted’ once again, this time to a sphere more highly commoditized (widely available, greater volume, lower price) than the commercial space of a few exclusive delicatessen. We could say that compared to the supermarket the delicatessen is relatively enclaved and that, therefore, diversion and enclaving can take place simultaneously. This is a simple example but one that demonstrates how the value and meaning of things alter over time and space in ways that are not given.

Moreover, Appadurai suggests that a thing’s commodity value can be shaped, challenged and altered by the ‘interests of groups’ or the ‘entrepreneurial individual.’ In other words, the commodity value of sundried tomatoes is determined by individuals
(the farmer, the gourmand etc) and groups (importers, supermarket buyers, legislative bodies etc). Appadurai’s description of commodities thus emphasises human agency in determining the lives of things. Although Appadurai’s analysis is focused on ‘things’, his description can be used to illuminate how food producers may apply strategies of ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’ in relation to aspects of their identities and the food they produce as part of their commercial goals. This suggests that the relationship between food and identity is subject, at different times and for different ends, to self-conscious, commercially motivated and personally invested moments of definition, reinterpretation and assertion.

Crucially, however, Appadurai notes that strategies of ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’ are more available to those ‘politically and economically powerful groups in society’ or the ‘entrepreneurial individual’. Similarly, I want to stress my recognition that in using the terms ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’ to describe how food producers project their ‘selves’ as part of their commercial practices, I also recognise that the ability to ‘divert’ or ‘enclave’ is not equally available to all food producers, especially those without economic or cultural capital. In the analysis that follows I focus on three entrepreneur food producers who, as a result of their respective businesses, have acquired considerable wealth and, in the case of Alan Yau, cultural capital.

The terms ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’ provide a means of examining food producer life stories and commercial food practice as mutually constituted. In particular, elements of people’s identities and subjectivities that are seemingly ‘natural’, ‘non-commercial’ and ‘personal’ - such as ethnicity, ‘passion’ and ‘feeling’ - can be ‘diverted’ as a part of the commercial practice of food production. Food producers thus project their ‘selves’ into the commercial sphere, a process that highlights production as a reflexive business that is inextricably produced through personal histories, subjectivities and wider social discourse. More specifically, producers’ ethnically embodied identities can provide a narrative focus through which the image of their commercial food practices or products can be enhanced. In other words, individual producers may, at times, be able to harness essentialist assumptions connecting food and ethnicity as part of their commercial goals. These could be referred to as strategies of essentialism and are important for two reasons. First, they suggest that individuals may not only be subject to identity discourses, but may, at times, be invested in them and able to appropriate or interpret
them according to their own commercial agendas. Second, my reading suggests how individuals commodify elements of their identities and as such confuse differences between people and things and commerce and culture.

An explicit example of a food producer mobilising stereotypes about food’s relation to identity is provided by Wing Yip, a British Chinese owner of the UK’s largest chain of Asian supermarkets. When I asked him about his attitudes towards food and cooking and his earliest memories of food his answer was telling:

Polly: Can you describe your earliest memories of food?
Wing Yip: Well it’s like anybody else’s isn’t it? Well, not particular. In a Chinese village on a Chinese side as you know we have a ¼ human race with only 8-10% land and we eat to survive isn’t it? Not like the French – they eat to enjoy life, they live to eat.
Polly: Do you think this has had an impact on the way you think about food now?
Wing Yip: No not really. Since you keep this record for three to five years, to me food is a commodity, I’m in business. If I tell you anything else I would be lying to you. You probably interview Elizabeth Taylor about her art, her film, but it probably is to her a job, nothing glory about it. This is a very honest answer. To me food is a business.
Polly: What answer would you give if I were a radio journalist and this was being broadcast? What would be the different answer you would give?
Wing Yip: I would probably say I think I love food so much I go into it, now I’m telling you I love money so much I’m going into it. It’s true isn’t it? If you ask a film star they say they want to be an artist but they love the cheque.27

Yip’s answer is a reminder that an emotional, sensual and pleasurable interest in food and cooking is a relative luxury and not available to those who suffer from starvation or poverty. Yip confesses his investment in food is pecuniary but admits to fabricating an emotional interest in and passion for food when presenting himself and his business to certain audiences. This is a reminder of Heldke’s observation that objective rationality is not the ideal when producing food for others (Heldke, 1992). Yip understands that as a food producer he is expected to be emotionally and personally invested in food as an emotional, cultural and physical practice. More specifically, Yip may be able to turn an assumed relationship between his Chinese ethnicity and particular food practices to commercial profit. Yip’s commercial enterprise, is partially made profitable and possible through associations with feelings and emotions that are imaginatively

27 Interview with Wing Yip, born China 1937, food retailer, recorded by Polly Russell 2/5/01, Tape 1 Side AC821/62/01
constituted ‘outside’ or ‘beyond’ the commercial sphere. In other words, though a
person’s feelings and ethnicity might be more usually understood to exist in an
‘enclaved’ realm – one outside of obvious commercial value - Yip removes his
emotionally embodied self ‘from an enclaved zone to one where exchange is less
confined and more profitable’. Yip’s confession in which he describes pretending to
care about food both brings into question the inevitability of food’s relation to identity
and suggests that this relation may be appropriated and fabricated for commercial gain.

The practices of other food producers suggest how essentialist stereotypes of food’s
relation to ethnicity can be differentially mobilised as an integral part of their
commercial enterprise. Through embodied associations with particular food products,
practices, histories and biographies, food producers can afford products greater
‘authenticity’, ‘realness’ and perceived quality. In simple terms, a samosa made by an
Indian might be supposed to be ‘better’, more ‘real’ and therefore potentially more
commercial than one made by an Italian. In my chapter examining narratives of
authenticity, for example, I detail how Stephen Hallam’s ethnic Britishness is
legitimised through and legitimises the commercial production of Melton Mowbray
Pork Pies. In the case of the food manufacturing company S&A Foods it is largely
through owner Perween Warsi’s embodied association with the S&A brand that the
expertise of the company is promoted. In a sense, Warsi’s Indian ‘ethnicity’ is diverted
from a non-commercial, private realm and commodified as part of a self-conscious
connection with the commercial aims of S&A Foods. Warsi appropriates racialised
assumptions about her Indian identity and its connection to food to authenticate and
validate the commercial manufacture of Indian food. This process, however, is
-described by Warsi as being both liberating in that it facilitates her financial success but
also as limiting and constraining.

During the seven months I interviewed Warsi, the head offices of S&A Foods were
being built from scratch. Our first meetings took place in Warsi’s temporary office, a
very comfortable and amply decorated porta-cabin to one side of the S&A
manufacturing plant. The decoration in this office included some Indian looking fabrics
and orange walls, a combination that created a vaguely ‘ethnic’ aesthetic. The first
conversation I had with Warsi, while the tape recorder was switched off, regarded the
office decoration. Warsi talked about her plans for a new office which she intended to
be ‘totally modern’ and with less of an ‘ethnic’ theme. Warsi explained that S&A Foods had to ‘get away’ from being seen as an ‘ethnic’ business. Months later, when I visited the new office, Warsi was seated in a large room painted light lilac with modern, minimalist decoration and no hint of an ‘ethnic’ style. At this time Warsi recorded her thoughts about how the S&A brand and head offices had been altered as part of a long term business strategy (See figure 1):

Warsi: Many years ago I had a buyer whom when we were not doing Chinese we served Chinese and he enjoyed it but turned around and said ‘Perween, you’re good at Indian food stick to your Indian.’ And I said ‘no, I don’t want to restrict my company by just producing Indian because food is fashion and it changes and if I can’t do it, and I understand that I am Indian and I have that background and I don’t know all that much about Chinese even though I can cook, but I can deliver the same authentic Chinese food to the customers and if I can’t do it I’ll bring someone who can...This shows customers’ confidence in our company that yes we are good at Indian, yes we can do Chinese but if we decide to move into other types of food we can still deliver the same quality...This can be limiting from the business point of view. I still believe that Indian dishes and Indian flavours will remain...however, you have to be open minded in business...therefore I don’t want to restrict this company because of my passion for Indian food.

Polly: Why did you change the S&A logo from the coriander leaf to its current design?
This gave an image that we wanted to project was freshness and authenticity and Indian food. So the coriander leaf was fine initially....The company has now moved ahead, it is now a dynamic, fast moving, modern, upmarket, forward-looking company doing other than and more than Indian cuisine so it’s a different image of the company and I wanted to project that image, the future S&A Foods rather than the past S&A Foods, although we treasure the past but past in history is no guarantee of the future...so I wanted to project the image of what we are now, rather than what we were.28

That the company profits might be ‘limited’ by being associated too closely with Indian food and her own Indian identity is clearly a concern for Warsi. In this extract Warsi argues that commercial necessity demands that she challenge the boundaries of what her clients believe S&A Foods is capable of manufacturing and therefore the boundaries of how she and the S&A brand are outwardly perceived. The changes to the S&A brand are, therefore, a means through which she renegotiates her own association with the business. In challenging her clients about her ability to manufacture Chinese food, Warsi must surrender a degree of the identity narrative connecting her Indianess with S&A Foods – the ‘passion’ for Indian food remains but only as long as it does not ‘restrict’ any ‘forward-looking’ product development.

28 Interview with Perween Warsi (2001) Tape 6 Side B & Tape 7 Side A C821/37/06 & 07
This is an example of S&A branding after the 2002 redesign. The original S&A logo, a green coriander leaf, is no longer included. According to Warsi, the green of the new branding is consistent with the original logo and connotes ‘freshness’. By removing the coriander leaf the S&A brand is not signified as an Indian food specialist and is therefore able to expand into different markets including Chinese, British and Mexican.
Warsi, however, cannot disavow her connection with Indian food because the 'history' of her company’s success is bound up with her Indianness and the metaphorical associations of the old coriander leaf logo. Moreover, 'enclaving' at the level of the personal is the thing that differentiates Warsi from 'other' producers who are 'non Indians'. In 'moving ahead' and being 'dynamic' Warsi has to shake off some of that 'authentic Indianness'. Warsi thus 'enclaves' and 'diverts' her ethnic identity in conjunction with commercial strategies at different times to suit different ends. Warsi’s approach to her business therefore involves complex and reflexive identity transactions. To start, Warsi 'diverts' her Indianness from a 'private' enclaved zone to serve business objectives, becoming in a few years one of the leading manufacturers of Indian food in the United Kingdom. When she wants to expand her interest in the food market beyond the boundaries of Indian food Warsi dilutes the ethnically embodied association between herself and S&A Foods by removing the coriander leaf logo, the 'ethnic' decorations in her office and appointing different ethnically inscribed experts, such as a Chinese chef, to head product development. Warsi can be understood to have reined back her Indianness into an 'enclaved' zone where it is more related to her personal 'passion' than it is intrinsically linked to her business. Warsi consciously manipulates how her ethnicity is linked to the business through strategies of 'enclaving' and 'diversion' so she can perpetuate a personal and professional narrative which is flexible enough that the business can thrive either because or despite it.

Alan Yau provides a different, and more complicated, opportunity to explore how the lived experience of food’s relation to ethnicity can become woven, through strategies of ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’, with commercial ideology and vision. Yau was born in the mid 1960s in a village on the Chinese border with British Hong Kong, a space infused with Chinese and British influences. This spatial metaphor is helpful in thinking about Yau, who describes himself as having a transitional identity in terms of generation, culture and class:

Yau: I think I represent the transitional part of that generation. The first one is my parents who came to this country as economic migrants and I suppose I represent the second generation of that who really were born in the same country as my parents but was brought up here and so culturally we kind of adopted a blend of the two cultures and tried to live with that. And I suppose the generation after me will have been born in this country and will have lost what I’ve got in

29 For a detailed discussion of how Patak’s and Sharwood’s differentially deploy the term ‘passion’ in the marketing of their Indian food ranges see Jackson, 2002
Yau’s explanation of experiencing different cultures as something he and his parents ‘tried to live with’ suggests how identity is an achievement and negotiation rather than a given fact (du Gay, 1996). Yau’s narration of his identity as something created and existing between boundaries, moreover, has determined and driven his career as a restaurateur. As has been noted earlier, Yau’s experience of working in his parents' Chinese takeaway when he was a teenager was so unpleasant he planned to avoid the industry that he associated with hard work, low pay and racist stereotyping. What I wanted to understand, therefore, was how and why Yau had become the successful originator and owner of Wagamama and Hakkasan restaurants. ‘In a sense,’ Yau explained ‘I was not forced back but driven back because I know the business so well’. But, although insider knowledge of the takeaway and restaurant industry facilitated Yau’s career, restaurants became part of a wider personal and political agenda that was determined through his reflexive recognition of his own past and his ‘transitional’ identity.

Each of Yau’s ventures has, in different ways, broken from the mould of a ‘typical’ Chinese restaurant. The commercial drive to break the mould is bound up with Yau’s understanding of his transitional identity and his own self-conscious attempts to challenge and redefine stereotypes associated with Chinese identity that he was subjected to as a young child and teenager. Escaping the limitations, literal and metaphorical, of the Chinese takeaway is bound up with escaping from the limitations of how he is signified though his Chinese ethnicity. To examine this further it helps to consider Yau’s approaches to his respective restaurant ventures. Yau’s first restaurant concept, Wagamama, was part of what he described as a ‘democratic agenda’:

Yau: There was a lot of political energy within me and I felt I wanted to create a place that was egalitarian in its approach in terms of the pricing and in terms of

---

30 Interview with Alan Yau (2001) Tape 1 Side A, C821/61/01
31 Yau opened the first Wagamama restaurant in 1992. By the time he sold the business there were four Wagamama’s. Wagamama was also a catalyst for the expansion and popularity of the Japanese and noodle market, arguably a forerunner to the highly successful Yo! Sushi brand. Yau opened Hakkasan in 2001 in central London. Hakkasan has been widely critically acclaimed as the top Chinese restaurant in London. It is widely accepted that Yau’s restaurants have changed attitudes towards not only the Chinese restaurant market in the UK but eating out more generally.
32 Interview with Alan Yau (2001) Tape 5 Side A, C821/61/05
the seating arrangement and the seating itself would determine the overall ethos of the place.  

With Wagamama, Yau changed the typical layout and hierarchical structure of a UK restaurant by using bench seating like a canteen, an open kitchen and a flat management structure. The predominantly ramen noodle menu was inspired by Japanese street food typically cooked by Chinese immigrants, a product of cultural blending that appealed to Yau. The atmosphere and service at Wagamama are informal and all the restaurant dishes, cooked to order, are produced quickly. Yau’s intention was to serve high quality, critically acclaimed fast food. The blending of the fast food system, the democratic restaurant structure and the Chinese/Japanese ramen noodle were conceptually bound up with Yau’s investment in moving beyond limits. In his narrative, Yau described Wagamama as ‘the brave new world’, a business concept that attempted to implement optimistic ideologies of equality, quality and fairness. Hakkasan, Yau’s most recent venture, appears at first to be a complete contrast to Wagamama. While Wagamama was intended to appeal to a wide customer base through low pricing, informal and fast service and canteen-style seating, Hakkasan is exclusive and expensive. Hakkasan is hidden away down a dead-end alley in central London without any sign. Finding Hakkasan for the first time can be difficult and it is likely that there is almost no passing trade. Before entering Hakkasan a doorman assesses customer’s attire and checks a guest list. A meal at Hakkasan, without alcohol, will cost around £60 per person, the waiters wear designer uniforms, there is a resident DJ and Naomi Campbell is a regular customer.

Though Wagamama and Hakkasan seem to be very different concepts in talking to Yau it became clear that they are ultimately part of the same agenda and one that is inextricably tied up with Yau’s lived politics and narrative of his ethnic identity. With the design, menu and staffing of Hakkasan, Yau challenges and reworks the culinary and conceptual limitations of the ‘typical’ British Chinese restaurant. This intention is primarily commercial but it is also related to Yau’s personal agenda to ‘push’ at the limits (from his transitional position) of how Chineseness is signified:

33 Interview with Alan Yau (2001) Tape 10 Side A, C821/61/10
34 Interview with Alan Yau (2001) Tape 11 Side B, C821/61/11
35 Hakkasan received a Michelin star in November 2002
Polly: Does Hakkasan change anything about the way the Chinese community is viewed in England?

Yau: I like to think so, I like to think that it is kind of put, put the different emphasis on what is Chineseness to the market place. I think from a fairly immigrant, you know, led approach and perception to a slightly more sophisticated level of both in terms of product and management style so in that sense I hope it push the agenda, it’s, I’m not too sure what the right word is [...] I like to think that the way we operate has overcome that credibility gap a normal Chinese restaurant would have and in that sense it is you know nice to have that perception in the market place. So what I’m saying is that that quality as some sort of rubber stamp compared to all the other Chinese restaurant and imagine if all the other restaurants can do that, to me it would have quite a strong influence on how the Chinese community is perceived in this country whether it is to do with a restaurant or something else.\(^{36}\)

Yau attempts to challenge the ‘credibility gap’ by changing the Chinese restaurant market from ‘chop suey’ to top quality. Through food, Yau hopes to ‘rewrite’ the stereotyped and racist associations of Chinese ethnicity and he does this, differentially, through strategies of ‘diversion’ and ‘enclaving’. In the early 1990s with Wagamama Yau takes Asian noodles, not a feature of the mainstream UK food market at the time, and ‘diverts’ them into a highly commercial mass market sphere. In so doing Yau introduces the public to a new style of eating and redefines elements of both ‘ethnic’ and also fast-food dining. By contrast with Hakkasan, Yau has taken ‘typical’ British Chinese food, readily available at the mid to low end of the restaurant market and therefore highly commodified, and created a highly stylised restaurant serving ‘modernised’ dim sum. In a sense Hakkasan – exclusive, expensive, status conscious – is an attempt to enclave Chinese food – that is remove it from a highly commoditized zone into a more protected sphere. By doing this Yau hopes to change the status of ‘normal’ Chinese food in the UK and, by association, stereotypes of Chinese identity. Paradoxically, through processes of ‘enclaving’ Yau produces a version of Chinese food that is only available to a few, yet Yau hopes that his brand of high quality Chinese food may provide a ‘rubber stamp’ for other Chinese restaurants and therefore be ‘diverted’ into a highly commoditized zone.

Moreover, in attempting to challenge the low status of Chinese food and change ‘how the Chinese community is perceived in this country’ Yau resists embodied associations

\(^{36}\) Interview with Alan Yau (2001) Tape 15 Side A C821/61/15
between ethnicity and food. At the first meeting I had with Yau he described how he hated being interviewed by journalists because they always focused on his background, on his family and on his relations with the wider Chinese community. Yau said he felt that ethnically British restaurateurs such as Terrence Conran or Gordon Ramsay were able to talk about their businesses without having to situate them in relation to a personal ethnic narrative. Yau felt that the emphasis on his ethnic difference risked marginalising his commercial practices and stereotyping him. Yau’s resistance to highlighting his embodied ethnicity and its relation to his commercial practices is bound up with his commercial strategies. Yau refuses, for example, to ‘authenticate’ his restaurants by employing Asian waiting staff. Both Wagamama and Hakkasan are staffed by an ethnically mixed, young and fashionable groups of waiting staff, many who are temporary migrant-travellers from Australia, New Zealand and North America. In her analysis of New York restaurant culture, Sharon Zukin has suggested that over the last decade waiting jobs have been favoured by out-of-work artists, actors and musicians. Zukin suggests that waiting staff play a significant factor in determining a restaurant’s cultural capital (Zukin, 1995: 153-185). In attempting to disassociate his restaurants from stereotyped embodiments of ‘Asian’ identities, Yau’s staffing policies are intended to differentiate his restaurants from ‘typical’ ‘ethnic’ restaurants and thus ensure their cultural cache. This strategy is both commercially and politically motivated.

In order for the status of Chinese food and, by association Chineseness to be heightened, Yau has to remove embodied associations between Chinese food and Chinese identity. The staffing strategies of both Wagamama and Hakkasan, to some extent, mean that neither restaurant is associated with ‘ordinary’ ‘ethnic’ restaurants in ways that mean they can possibly challenge the limitations and stereotypes associated with certain foods and identities designated as ‘other.’ Clearly an ability to mobilise and challenge the boundaries of ethnicity in these ways is made possible by considerable economic and cultural capital. As a young worker in his parents’ takeaway, for instance, Yau is unable to challenge the racist connections between food and ethnicity that result in his being abused and taunted. Recalling Yau’s earlier description of the racial abuse he and his family were subjected to through their association with the Chinese takeaway, Yau’s agenda with staff at Wagamama and Hakkasan is revealing. Though Yau does not associate his embodied ethnicity with his commercial practices, his refusal to do so involves strategies of ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’ that allow him to mobilise the
boundaries of food’s association with ethnicity to create new markets and new narratives of Chinese identity in the UK.

Applying concepts of ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’ to examine commercial culture breaks down divisions between commerce and culture, people and things, and demonstrates identity as a complex, fluid process that can be mobilised for political and commercial ends. The three examples – Wing Yip, Perween Warsi and Alan Yau - suggest that food producers are able to mobilise the assumed relation between food and identity in different ways. Wing Yip, for example, ‘acts out’ an embodied association with food and in doing so confirms and reproduces narratives connecting identity and food, even though he admits that for him food is a commodity, no different from any other. While he claims to have no special interest in food beyond its pecuniary function, associations between food and identity facilitate and benefit Wing Yip’s commercial endeavours. Perween Warsi, meanwhile, mobilises and highlights her embodied association with particular food practices. For Warsi, although she makes embodied associations between her ethnicity and food that might be understood as a form of ‘diversion’, she ultimately finds this process commercially limiting. As a consequence of her ethnicity being associated with particular products and food practices she is restricted from expanding her business into markets other than Indian food. Warsi thus restricts or ‘enclaves’ the association between her ethnic identity and S&A Foods in order that the commercial business can flourish. Alan Yau, by contrast, refuses to mobilise stereotypes connecting embodied ethnicity with particular foods. By deploying strategies of ‘diversion’ and ‘enclaving’ Yau attempts to challenge the status of ‘typical’ Chinese food in the UK and in so doing alter stereotyped perceptions of the Chinese British community. Warsi and Yau, therefore, mobilise strategies of enclaving for different ends.

4.7 Summary
This chapter challenges assumptions about the relationship between food and ethnic identity, exploring the structural, personal and commercial implications of this relationship. The chapter argues that discourses of ethnicity in the food industry are central to discursively and imaginatively producing aspects of contemporary multicultural Britain. As I have noted, the discursive practices of culinary culture are bound up with the production of ‘difference’ in ways that normalise and naturalise ethnic Britishness. The chapter has established, therefore, that the discursive practices of
culinary culture are inextricably bound up with the politics and practices of ethnicity at a range of scales. I have demonstrated how optimistic and pessimistic narratives of multicultural culinary culture that are bound up with producing imaginings of global, national and local identities are simultaneously experienced, produced and negotiated at an embodied, individual and subjective scale. This recognition is significant because it brings into question the notion of ethnic difference as given and instead suggests that difference is negotiated, produced and shaped. As narrated in their life story interviews the lived experiences of food producers suggest that the assumed relations between food and ethnicity are negotiated from the inside out, for private and commercial reasons. These explorations have suggested how optimistic and pessimistic discourses of food and identity are experienced and understood as part of narrative and lived experience but have also indicated the conceptual limitations of these respective positions. In so doing the chapter complicates conventional accounts of the politics involved in the ‘commodification of others’ by assessing how narratives of multiculturalism are appropriated in different contexts by different food producers.

Through applying Appadurai’s notions of ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’, I have attempted to demonstrate how individuals might harness the politics of difference as part of their commercial practice. Exploring extracts of life stories from three food producers, my analysis details how, through strategies of ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’ they have mobilized, refused and negotiated the assumed connections between food and ethnicity in food production. Appadurai’s notions of ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’ allow for a reading of the commodification of ethnicity as a potentially two-way process that may not be available to everyone, particularly those without economic or cultural resources, but which nevertheless complicates both optimistic and pessimistic narratives. Moreover, applying the notions ‘enclaving’ and ‘diversion’ to food producer practices highlights identity as complex and negotiated and as such brings into question essentialist assumptions of ‘difference’ that underlie both optimistic and negative narratives of multicultural culinary culture. This chapter has demonstrated that the relation between food and ethnicity is specific to different contexts and always subject to change.

While discourses of ethnicity are made manifest through narratives of multicultural culinary culture, these are inextricably related to discourses of gender and class that are
made manifest through narratives of domesticity and authenticity. The following chapter focuses on narratives of domesticity as a means of examining how gendered identities are produced through the discursive practices of the food industry. As with the analysis undertaken in this chapter, the life stories of food producers suggest that at different times and with different results food producers can mobilise the assumed relation between gender and food in ways that can be commercially and personally beneficial. Moreover, as with narratives of multicultural culinary culture, narratives of domesticity, I suggest, are inextricably bound up with producing identity at a range of related scales including the home and the nation.
CHAPTER 5
NARRATIVES OF DOMESTICITY AND BRITISH CULINARY CULTURE

5.1 Introduction

Tradition conjures up images of the little housewife preparing the family roast, blissfully unaware that the family itself has undergone major changes. In these ways and others, food is represented as a respite from the realities of postmodernism, post-industrialism, post-colonialism and even post-feminism. In its sincere, authentic mode, food writers by and large serve up static social categories and fairly fixed ideas about social relations. (Probyn, 2000: 26)

In addition to the prevalence of narratives of multiculturalism, a secondary characteristic of British culinary culture is the prevalence of narratives of domesticity. These narratives emphasise a connection between particular food products or practices and the spaces, practices and social relations of the ‘traditional’, ‘ideal’ home. In general terms, the ‘idealised’ ‘traditional’ home, and particularly the kitchen, is envisaged as a feminine space, a private sphere where the ‘natural’ abilities of women to care and nurture are located. That the relation between domesticity and gender is historically constructed rather than in some sense inevitable or ‘natural’ has been well documented (Davidoff & Hall, 1987; Light, 1991). Research considering food’s role in producing gender relations, moreover, has done much to unsettle naturalised constructions of women’s traditional role as homemaker (DeVault, 1991; Murcott, 1983b, 1997; Inness, 2001b). This work has highlighted how women’s ‘natural’ place in the home is learned through the socialising experience of girlhood, rather than being evidence of essential ‘femaleness’. The tasks associated with the gendered sphere of domesticity, in particular food shopping, cooking and feeding, have been shown to play a key role in determining gender roles. While narratives of multiculturalism are inextricably bound up with discourses of ethnicity, therefore, narratives of domesticity are bound up with discourses of gender.

Generally speaking, analysis of food’s relation to gender has tended to focus on the practices and spaces of the ‘traditional’ home. Less attention has been paid to the production of gender identities within the commercial spaces of food production. This
tendency has led to a theoretical reification of the boundaries between ‘home’ and ‘work’ that fails to account for food’s role in producing gendered identities in and through multiple and overlapping spaces. In this chapter I consider the ways in which narratives of domesticity are mobilised by food producers. By focusing on the prevalence of narratives of domesticity in the commercial production of food I hope to complicate the boundary between home and work. More specifically, my analysis demonstrates that naturalised assumptions about the relation between women, food and caring can be mobilised in commercial settings. Female food producers, for example, often highlight their roles as mothers, daughters and wives when marketing their food products or businesses. Moreover, male food producers, especially chefs, often emphasise maternal influences as inspiring and determining their relation with food.

‘Traditional’ domesticity is understood here to refer to a range of historically contingent practices and spaces. In particular, ‘traditional’ domesticity involves narratives and practices that naturalise and reproduce divisions between the ‘private’ sphere of the home as female and the ‘public’ sphere of work as male. With increasing numbers of women working outside the home, and with many households bearing no resemblance to the traditional nuclear family the degree to which food practices reify, reflect and produce traditional gender hierarchies may well be supposed to be less significant than they once were (Valentine, 1999). Moreover, changes in the food industry, especially the sophistication of cold-chain distribution, have, for many women, removed the obligation of cooking every day:

> Technological developments in the last few decades have lightened the chore of preparing and cooking food, and have to some extent reduced the need for traditional knowledge and skills. Family meals made by specialist cooks are on the decline, along with the role of the housewife as the arbiter of taste and nutrition. (Atkins & Bowler, 2001: 312)

Despite these technological developments and the changing nature of gender roles and gender relations in the 21st century, Murcott’s research indicates that women continue to do more cooking, shopping and preparing of food than men (Murcott, 1983a & b, 1997). This claim is supported by the Health Education Authorities’ 1993 Health and Lifestyles Survey which found that of 5,553 people in England, for example, 67% of women

---

1 The use of quotation marks emphasises the recognition that ‘traditional’ domesticity is constructed, contingent, relational and subject to contestation.
cooked every day versus 18.4% of men and while only 2.6% of women never cooked, 22.4% of men never cooked (quoted in Caraher et al., 1999).

Despite significant changes in household organisation women tend to take greater responsibility for domestic tasks, especially those involving food and cooking. Narratives, practices and spaces of 'traditional' domesticity continue, therefore, to play a key role in producing and maintaining gendered social relations. In the following extract Gillian Rose evocatively explains how women are produced and subjected through the practices and spaces of 'traditional' domesticity:

[D]omestic geography traces that woman's role in patriarchal society: she is expected to be a housewife and therefore in the kitchen, the site of much of her domestic labour, she can challenge her husband, get angry, speak with authority, and be heard, 'get uptake.' But in the bedroom she has no authority to speak independently...This everyday geography of kitchens and bedrooms – and streets and workplaces and neighbourhoods – is the geography of many women's spatiality, and of feminism too. Feminism, I think, through its awareness of the politics of the everyday, has always had a very keen awareness of the intersection of space and power – and knowledge. (Rose, 1993: 142)

According to Rose, the gendered practices of 'traditional' domesticity result from the particular 'intersection of space and power – and knowledge'. How then might the relation between space, power and knowledge be reconfigured when narratives of domesticity are mobilised outside the boundaries of the domestic in the commercial sphere of food production? In answering this question and considering the ways that the commercial appropriation of domesticity takes place, this chapter draws on Judith Butler's work questioning the 'compulsory order' of gender, sex and sexuality (Butler 1990, 1993). Judith Butler's descriptions of gender as a performative practice could be used to argue that narratives of domesticity in the food industry regulate and produce normative gendered identities. On the other hand, food production allows for the possibility of gender subversion by confusing the boundaries between home and work and bringing into question 'traditional' gendered practices associated with food. I suggest that the commercial appropriation of narratives of domesticity can potentially subvert or challenge gender and race stereotypes and as such can reconfigure 'traditional' intersections of space, power and knowledge.

The chapter is split into three sections. The first (5.2) analyses domesticity as a historical construct and examines its role in producing gendered spaces and social
relations. The second section (5.3) details the prevalence of narratives and practices of domesticity in the food industry. In the third and final section (5.4) I draw from four case studies to examine the ways that food producers mobilise domesticity as part of their commercial food practices. This analysis provides a detailed account of the ways that individuals negotiate commercial culture by drawing from and appropriating their own raced and gendered experiences of domesticity. Although each of the producers appropriates domesticity in different ways and with different effects, the chapter illustrates the ways in which ‘traditional’ narratives of domesticity are bound up with the practices and discourses of identity and its relation to place. Narratives of domesticity are thus constitutive of raced notions of the role of the home in producing ‘the community’ and gendered constructions of national identity.

5.2 Domestic Practices
Within the context of this chapter domesticity and the domestic refer to the practices and spaces of the family and home and, in particular, the historical association between women and familial caring and domestic responsibilities such as cleaning and cooking. Though domesticity is configured as a romanticised ideal, it cannot be separated from practices and discourses of subordination and control. The terms domestic, domestication and domesticity have a range of meanings that are associated with the bounding of space, controlling ‘nature’ through taming and ‘civilising’ and notions of settlement, fixity, ownership, property and possession. In providing a geography of domestication, Kay Anderson argues that European domestication practices have defined not only human relationships with certain animals but also relations between groups of people based on race and gender (Anderson, 1997). Colonial notions of racial superiority, for instance, were in part predicated and produced through the association between domestication and progress:

Equally certain peoples could be transformed into putatively more human humans. Just as non domesticated plants were ‘weeds’ and non domesticated animals were ‘wild’, non western indigenous people typically bore the title of ‘savage’. They were people who stood at the beginning of social time, ‘unevolved’ though having themselves remained undomesticated. (Anderson, 1997:474)

Moreover, as processes of control, ownership and containment, domestication is inextricably bound up with the regulation of reproduction that has entailed the spatial and symbolic association between women and the enclosed space of the home. In pre-
capitalist Europe there was no rigid gendered division of domestic space but during industrialisation this changed:

Nature, that was as yet open to cultivation, discovery and rational inquiry became encoded with calls to masculinity. By contrast, ‘nature’ that summoned forth images of things that were (either ideally or practically) tamed – the body, the home, the garden – was progressively feminized. The European ideal of womanhood came to figure women as domesticated, as beings attached to the concerns of the domus. (Anderson, 1997: 476)

Processes of domestication and the spaces and practices of domesticity are, therefore, central to ways that gender and race (and class) have been constructed in different historical periods and spatial contexts.²

Marjorie De Vault notes that the association between women, the home and domestic activity was actively constructed during the nineteenth century ‘in tandem with larger projects aimed at consolidating men’s power’ and also by ‘women reformers who aimed to develop the home as a site of power and influence’ (DeVault, 1991: 95). One of the effects of industrialisation was the emergence of ideologies of waged work associated with men and located outside the home, and unpaid domestic work carried out by women within the home:

The nineteenth-century “cult of domesticity” emphasized the construction of “home” life in opposition to the larger society, and depended on the association of women with home and men with public activity outside the family (DeVault, 1991: 225).

As DeVault and others have noted, however, the gendered division between ‘public’ and ‘private’ was seldom so clear in practice. In their analysis of the role that gender played in the construction of middle class family life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall note that ideological constructions of the home naturalised gender divisions between private and public, female and male. They stress, however, that these divisions were ‘constantly being tested, challenged and reworked both in the imagination and in the encounters of daily life’ (Davidoff and Hall,

² Metaphors of domestication have been drawn upon recently in research considering how social relations are constituted through and by public space. Sharon Zukin, for instance, talks about ‘domestication by cappuccino’ in describing the restoration of Bryant Park in New York city through private investment (Zukin, 1995: xiv). Peter Jackson’s investigations into public space and social identity in London proposes that the popularity of the mall represents the ‘domestication of the street’ as a way of avoiding ‘unmediated confrontation with social difference’ (Jackson, 1998a: 178).
Davidoff and Hall’s research emphasises that though the public and private spheres were constructed and imagined as separate, in reality they were overlapping and mutually constituted:

[M]iddle class men who sought to be ‘someone’, to count as individuals because of their wealth, their power to command or their power to influence people, were, in fact, embedded in networks of familial and female support which underpinned their rise to public prominence. (Davidoff & Hall, 1987: 13)

Davidoff and Hall draw attention to domesticity and its role in producing gender as historically and ideologically constituted but also as contingent and unstable.

Despite this, however, the ideal of domesticity has pervaded well beyond the nineteenth century. In her examination of the relationship between constructions of femininity and class in the post World War I period, for instance, Alison Light demonstrates how anxieties about both nationalist identities and femininities were mediated through narratives of domesticity (Light, 1991). Women’s command of the domestic sphere was seen as being integral to the success of imperial interests. Light suggests that middle-class femininity and the home were drawn upon to construct classed and raced notions of Englishness. Focused on a more contemporary context, Deborah Leslie suggests that ideals of domesticity are a repeated feature of contemporary women’s magazines (Leslie, 1993). According to Leslie, anxieties about changes in social and economic conditions – the breakdown of the ‘traditional’ family for example – have resulted in attempts to reaffirm nostalgic and traditional versions of femininity through recourse to idealised depictions of domesticity and domestic space.

Recognising ‘traditional’ domesticity as historically constituted, contingent and contested is not the same as discounting the continued effects of domesticity in determining and producing social relations. As Alan Warde argues: ‘The association of care, love, family and provision is intricate and inextricable, and serves to largely confirm the subordination of women in society more widely’ (Warde, 1997: 131). Moreover, DeVault’s study illustrates that the caring aspect of feeding traditionally undertaken by women in a domestic setting is both produced by and produces the ideological construction of the family (DeVault, 1991). According to DeVault, the home
is ‘encoded’ as feminine, the ‘natural’ space of female caring and love. The spaces and practices of domesticity thus continue to naturalise gender differences.

Feminists have argued that the ideological function of the naturalised association between women and domesticity has been in both facilitating capitalist accumulation and ensuring patriarchal hierarchies. Nicki Charles and Marion Kerr suggest that women’s traditional position within the home is essential in maintaining the workforce both at a material and ideological level (Charles & Kerr, 1988). Women provide the worker with meals, look after his home and family and satisfy his sexual needs. Moreover, women are responsible for reproducing the ideological dimension to the social structure through enforcing rules, manners and devolving tasks on the basis of gender. Food preparation and consumption, moreover, plays a significant role in reproducing gender relations in the home:

The dominance of the father is recreated daily through the preparation of a proper meal which is usually eaten by all members of the family together and in which the children have very little if any choice. (Charles & Kerr, 1988: 24)

Feeding, along with other domestic practices, can be conceptualised as part of the reproduction of ideologies and social divisions which are constitutive of the social order.

Broadly speaking, feminist readings of food and domesticity are divided between those that have focussed on these as sites of anxiety and struggle and those that envisage them as expression and/or empowerment for women. Much of the former argues that women’s private relationship with food (attempts to control the body and health through dieting and exercise) and their public relationship with food (women as low status providers) are the problematic materialisation of gender inequalities (Bordo, 1993; Orbach, 1988; Lawrence, 1987; Lupton, 1996). By contrast, some feminist anthropologists and sociologists have emphasised how food and cooking are important tools of female power (Avakian, 1998; Inness, 2001a & b). As Shirley Inness states:

Foodstuffs have offered women a way to gain power and influence in their households and larger communities. For women without access to other forms of creative expression, preparing a superior cake or batch of fried chicken has been a way to display their talent in an acceptable venue. (Inness, 2001b: xi)
Though the value of academic work in this field has been widely acknowledged, these positive/negative readings overstate and reinstate conceptual binaries in ways that do not account for the fluidity and complexity of lived experience.

Although the spaces and practices of domesticity combine to normalise gendered power relations, research highlights how different groups’ experiences of the domestic differ. While some feminists have emphasised domestic space as a site of women’s subordination, black feminist scholars have pointed out that home can be a place of refuge from racism (hooks, 1991). Nicky Gregson and Michelle Lowe’s research on paid domestic labour in middle class households, meanwhile, demonstrates how domesticity constructs differences on the basis of class as well as gender (Gregson & Lowe, 1995). Focusing on dual career households rather than ‘traditional’ or nuclear families, Gregson and Lowe’s findings suggest that ‘although the waged domestic labour force in contemporary Britain may be homogeneous in its gendering, in class terms it is not a homogeneous entity’ (Gregson & Lowe, 1995: 155). My interviews with food producers demonstrate that individual experiences of domesticity vary dramatically. For Bernice Green, a school cleaner and London Transport cook, and Lady Caroline Waldegrave, Principal of Leith’s School of Food and Wine and the wife of a banker and former Conservative MP3, for instance, narratives and practices of domesticity not only have different meanings but also different effects. While ideals of domesticity might reify a nostalgic relation between women, home and family, actual experiences of domesticity are determined by the intersection of a range of cultural, social and economic factors.

Despite these differences, however, women food producers from diverse backgrounds share a common experience of what might be termed ‘domestic expectation’. In other words, a shared experience for all the women I interviewed was the familial and cultural expectation of domestic competence when they were growing up. This, to a lesser or greater degree, situated these women within and into the parameters of a ‘traditional’ life. Women from a range of social and economic contexts share a narrative of domesticity, one of whose effects is to produce them as women, mothers, daughters, wives and sisters. Writing about the practice of feminist oral history, Joan Sangster

3 Lord William Waldegrave
describes how women from different classes may experience the boundaries of their lives in similar ways:

Ideals of female domesticity and motherhood, reproduced in early home life, the school and the workplace, and notions of innate physical differences, for instance, were both factors moulding young women's sense of their limited occupational choices in both blue and white collar work in the 1930s. (Sangster, 1998: 87-88)

The women I interviewed ranged in age from 34 to 83 and to a greater or lesser degree the expectation of the domestic determined their schooling, training and career options. Joyce Molyneux, England’s first acclaimed female chef, describes her working class parents’ attitude towards her career in the late ‘40s. This attitude encapsulates the domestic expectation that has traditionally shaped many women’s lives:

My parents thought I was going to get married and anything you did in between was just filling in, you know, it was just a stop gap, it wasn’t anything permanent, you know it was just a way of kind of filling time till you got married and then you stopped work and then you brought up children.\(^4\)

Molyneux highlights, through her recognition that work was considered ‘stop gap’, ‘filling in’ and not ‘permanent’ how domesticity – marriage and family – were anticipated and constructed as being the central purpose of many women’s lives.

Similarly, though Bernice Green and Caroline Waldegrave are from dramatically different economic backgrounds, they were both constrained and contained by gendered expectations that associated them automatically with domesticity. For Green, cooking and cleaning for her family in Jamaica was understood as preparation for her future as a wife and domestic worker. For Waldegrave, despite having what she described as a ‘solid middle class life’ and attending private boarding schools, she left school with few formal qualifications. According to Waldegrave, the expectation that girls would get married and raise families meant that their education was regarded as relatively unimportant. Given the centrality of practices and narratives of domesticity to most women’s early girlhood experiences, it is perhaps not surprising that I found women food producers more likely than men to tell their life stories and career narratives through domestic references and reflections.

\(^4\) Interview with Joyce Molyneux, born in Birmingham, 1931, chef/restaurateur; recorded by Polly Russell 16.2.01, Tape 2 Side A, tape reference C821/53/2.
5.3 Domestic Spaces

In mobilising narratives of domesticity in their commercial food practices, food producers commodify a space whose idealised existence lies outside the commercial. The appropriation of narratives of domesticity is thus ultimately paradoxical, bringing together two symbolically separate spaces. The imagined distinction between domestic space and commercial space is central to the ways that gendered identities are normalised. In other words, our concepts of spaces are actively produced through different notions of gender and, in particular, through narratives and practices of domesticity undertaken within domestic spaces. The spatial and symbolic distinction between domestic cooking and commercial cooking provides a clear example of this. The historical evolution of the ‘gendered paradigm’ of cooking has been traced by food historian Stephen Mennell (1985). Professional chefs cooking in French and English courts, restaurants and hospitals in the nineteenth century were, he states:

> [a]t pains to differentiate their work from mere domestic cookery. Domestic cookery was in both countries see as primarily the preserve of females, whether paid women cooks or housewives cooking for their own families. (Mennell, 1985: 200)

Mennell suggests that a concept of ‘domestic cookery’ exists in contradistinction to practices and spaces of cooking that are understood as professional and masculine.

The spaces and practices of the professional and domestic kitchen remain, with few exceptions, diametrically opposed. Stereotypically the professional restaurant kitchen is a male dominated space and the non-professional domestic kitchen remains a female space. These different kitchen spaces produce and are produced by different gender stereotypes. While the domestic kitchen is imagined to be the comforting and emotional centre of a home, the professional kitchen is defined by hierarchical work structures, unsympathetic rules and long and hard working hours. Working in a professional kitchen qualifies a person for the title ‘chef’ and can be a mark of skill, status and

---

5 As Bell and Valentine (1997) note, however, geographical work has demonstrated that the public/private divide is in practice over simplified so that, for example, the private space of the home may not be private at all but may be subject to the publicity of family. Spaces within the home, therefore, can be organised for different publics. When interviewing Indian Food Consultant Shezad Hussain, for example, I was intrigued to discover that her house had both a public and private kitchen. The former was visible from the living room and was clean, neat and carefully decorated. The latter, where food was prepared, was tucked away through a door off the kitchen and was busy, messy, smelly and scruffy and was where the domestic helper spent most of her time. Hussain’s domestic arrangements provide a dramatic example of how ‘private’ spaces contain boundaries that demarcate different publics – in this instance the intimate family, the domestic helper and the invited guest.
regard. Traditionally in a domestic kitchen a woman employee is referred to as a ‘cook’ without professional qualifications. As Weismantal explains:

[Cooking] can be a gendered paradigm in which male work is seen as contributing to the larger public good: when men cook, they do so for the wealthy and powerful, or even for the gods. Men make public ceremony: the emphasis is upon the visible, the show. Female work in such analyses belongs to the domestic sphere and is intended for daily consumption: it is the invisible, the taken-for-granted. (Weismantel, 1996: 15)

As contemporary women chefs have demonstrated, however, professional kitchens do not necessarily have to maintain rigid hierarchies to produce high quality food. Joyce Molyneux’s critically acclaimed restaurant The Carved Angel, for instance, was run with a rotational staff system where everyone took turns washing up, waiting and cooking. The professional male kitchen is created, in part, as a gendered performance that maintains and displays a stylised form of masculinity that is set up and produced in opposition to the feminised spaces and practices of domesticity.

The historical demarcation between low status domestic cooking and high status professional cooking has been reproduced throughout the education system in Britain for most of the twentieth century. While domestic science, introduced into schools in the early twentieth century, formalised the notion of cooking and the kitchen as women’s domain, it was also the means by which ‘intelligent’ and ‘unintelligent’ girls were distinguished. Joyce Molyneux, an academically gifted student, for instance, describes how her ambition to become a chef was regarded in the late ‘40s:

Molyneux: And then it was this thing that you either did languages or the lower streams did cookery and things like that so I’d done Latin and when I came back to Birmingham in 1943 I carried on with that and there were four forms on the same level and the top two didn’t do cooking and the bottom two did. That was how it was organised in those days, if you were intelligent enough you did languages and if you weren’t you did cooking or sewing or something like that.

Polly: Do you remember what you felt about that?

Molyneux: Yes and I remember when I said I wanted to be a cook and they asked me what I wanted to do when I left school and they said ‘well there’s the teacher training college at Gloucester’ and I knew that we couldn’t afford to send me to teacher training college and I didn’t particularly want to teach I wanted to

---

6 Also Sally Clarke’s restaurant Clarke’s, Ruth Rogers and Rose Gray’s restaurant The River Café & Alice Waters’ Californian restaurant Chez Pannisse. Significantly these restaurants were some of the first to have open kitchens – a further example of public/private boundaries breaking down and a practice that encourages restrained kitchen behaviour as the customers look on.
cook so instead there was a domestic science college that was attached to the
technical college in Birmingham.\(^7\)

As Molyneux’s extract depicts, domestic cooking was institutionally devalued by being
associated with low achievers. The vagueness with which Molyneux describes domestic
science is telling. In saying ‘cooking’ and ‘sewing’ or, ‘something like that’ domestic
science could, in effect ‘be anything’ and is rendered unimportant and unclassified.
Molyneux’s decision to pursue a career as a ‘cook’ was regarded with disappointment
by her teachers. Molyneux’s extract indicates how domestic cooking, as unpaid work or
as a job, has historically and institutionally been held to be a low status activity that has
been reflective and constitutive of gender politics.

The status afforded women involved professionally with food continues to be a way that
gender hierarchies are maintained and established in practice. Rosemary Pringle’s study
of secretarial work and the social construction of gender in the work place found that
‘[w]omen are employed in a range of occupations in which the characteristics associated
with femininity and those associated with the jobs women do are congruent’ (Pringle,
1989: 139). In the mainstream food retail business women are usually responsible for
product development while men are usually responsible for buying and technology. The
internal structure of many large scale food businesses, therefore, reproduces the
gendered division between practices and narratives of domesticity and those of
economics and science.

In working as a Product Developer for Marks & Spencer I experienced this first hand.
Product Developers are responsible for quality control and food range management. Out
of thirty Product Developers only four were men. At both an institutional and an
informal level the gendered division of labour at Marks & Spencer Head Office
produced and perpetuated gender inequalities that were often articulated and legitimised
through women’s association with food and cooking. While it was possible for
Technologists and Buyers, who were predominantly male, to be promoted to Divisional
Director status, this was not possible for Developers. Moreover, informal narratives and
‘jokes’ trivialised Development work through emphasising characteristics
stereotypically associated with women. Developers were often referred to as ‘Scarves’,

\(^{7}\) Interview with Joyce Molyneux (2001), Tape 2 Side A, C821/53/02
the implication being that they were decorative rather than productive. Male employers often derided the role of Development by 'joking' that, 'anyone can taste'. By associating product development with 'naturally' feminine characteristics such as intuition, emotion and sensuality, this work was belittled. In other words, female developers were subject to narratives implying that their work did not require specialised knowledge or particular skills but rather a 'natural' affinity for understanding food. Of course, women developers resisted, negotiated and challenged these stereotypes on a daily basis but the historically low status of women’s cooking and the naturalised association between women and domestic skills meant that they were constantly finding their work undermined. The ways that gendered stereotypes of domesticity and cooking are reproduced by the internal structures and narratives of a food retail business emphasises how different spaces and practices are mutually constitutive. In other words, the 'masculine public working sphere' is, in part, produced through and by narratives and practices imaginatively associated with the 'feminine, private and domestic sphere'.

5.4 Commercial food production and the commodification of domesticity

The overlaps between commercial and domestic spaces and practices associated with food production are made even more explicit in the advertising and marketing of food products. Narratives of domesticity - references to the home and idealised associations between women, in particular mothers, and food, cooking and nurturing - are a common feature of commercial food products and services. Terms such as 'homemade', 'authentic' and 'traditional', for instance, are often used on packaging or advertising to describe products. As I detail fully in the next chapter, these implicitly engender nostalgic ideals of past places and social relations including 'traditional' domesticity and traditionally configured gender practices.

More specifically, from the mid-20th century food companies began developing fictional personalities to sell their products. Fictional personalities, of whom Betty Crocker and Aunt Jemima are the most well known, were presented as maternal authority figures who functioned as both the narrators and narrative of product identity. These idealised female figures offered consumers the promise of reliability and consistency in a rapidly changing world. Moreover, as Nathalie Cooke demonstrates in her analysis of the
history of Betty Crocker, 'cooking and homemaking personalities helped to feminise and humanise the food industry' (Cooke, 2002: 1). In Britain, Mrs Beeton, the author of the famous nineteenth century cookery and household manuals, died at the age of 28 after writing only one edition of the book (Freeman, 1977). Books by Mrs Beeton continue to be produced, reprinted and updated, and in 2001 the manufacturer Samworth Brothers, discussed in detail in the next chapter, bought the name Mrs Beeton to brand a food range. The pervasiveness of Mrs Beeton is a British example of the commercial appeal and application of a fictionalised domestic ideal. Commercial food products are also associated with gendered constructs of domesticity through the connection between specific products and idealised female, often maternal, consumers. The 'Bisto' gravy and more recent 'Sunny Delight' television adverts, for example, promise that these products will assist mothers short of time in creating a perfect family environment. In purchasing one of these products the consumer may willingly collaborate in, associate with or take comfort from, the constructed ideal of domesticity.

In addition to the creation of fictional maternal identities, the association of products with domesticity is bound up with the internal structure and organisational logic of commercial food production. For a number of large-scale food manufacturers, for example, women owners or partners are inextricably linked to commercial narratives of domesticity. These women are often depicted as being actively involved with recipe testing and product development, those processes of manufacturing that most closely resemble the domestic practices of the traditional home kitchen. On promotional and marketing material for Baxter's, the large Scottish soup and sauce producer, the centrality of the domestic skills of three generations of women is emphasised:

The finest ingredients, of course, are wasted if the care of preparation is not equally good. The Baxter ladies, Margaret, Ethel and Ena have, in their turn, successfully upheld the tradition of fine, wholesome home-cooking. The fact that the cooking pots have become progressively bigger has done nothing to diminish the natural goodness that comes out of them. With the help of scientific technology — such as huge rotating ovens which now cook the soup in cans and thereby preserve all the flavour and goodness — Baxter's products are still as nearly 'home-made' as possible. 

http://www.baxters.co.uk/history/index.html
Paradoxically this promotional narrative distinguishes between the spaces and practices of domestic and commercial cooking while simultaneously suggesting that mass manufacturing procedures and ideologies are embedded in domesticity. Similarly, Meena Pathak is held to be the creative cooking energy behind Patak's Indian sauce empire. The company website states that while Kirit Pathak is responsible for sourcing ingredients and marketing, his wife Meena supervises the blending of spices and all recipe development. The products produced in modern manufacturing plants and distributed around the world are thus symbolically associated with the comforting ideal of domestic cooking through embodied female identities. At the 'heart' of the commercial sphere the 'naturally' creative and nurturing skills of women and the imagined spaces of domesticity are placed. By mobilising and commodifying narratives of domesticity, food producers increase the appeal of products by creating an explanatory narrative that associates business practices and food products with knowable subject positions.

5.5 The Political Possibilities of Domesticity

This section explores how the commercial practices and life stories of four food producers are differentially embedded in narratives of domesticity. In this analysis I consider the political, personal and commercial implications when the 'private' realm of the domestic is invoked in the 'public' sphere of commercial food production. The analysis suggests that the commodification of domesticity is produced through negotiated performances that are shaped and determined by different social, economic and cultural contexts. This emphasises the domestic as shifting, contingent and relational. Moreover, the different practices of commodification cannot be explained outside of the social, cultural and economic contexts of each individual's life and in particular their experiences of gendered, classed and raced domesticity.

Although each of the four food producers considered here comes from diverse backgrounds, practices of domesticity (particularly cooking) situated and constituted them, in different ways, as subjects when growing up. In other words, although these food producers have different backgrounds, similar stereotyped practices of domesticity informed, shaped and produced them. Perween Warsi explains, for example, how the

---

* http://www.pataks.co.uk/pataks_australia/about/about.htm
spaces and practices of domesticity ensured her development as a dutiful daughter, wife and mother within the context of her Muslim Indian family. On the other hand, as the child of ambitious, middle-class, Guyanese parents, Rosamund Grant was taught the domestic skills required to run a home and family as a necessity rather than valued skill. For Grant’s middle-class educated family, domestic practices serve as an uncomfortable reminder of black women’s historical low status as domestic helpers. While Grant learned necessary domestic skills, therefore, she also learnt that they were not to be valued. For Nigella Lawson, the spaces and practices of domesticity were a source of female power and control but also resentment and anger. The domestic space of the kitchen was where Lawson felt most ‘useful’ and ‘wanted’ as a daughter but also where she witnessed her mother’s depression and temper and so came to know her ‘place’ in the family hierarchy. For Deepak Sharma, the only son of Indian parents, domestic practices determined and produced ‘traditional’ gendered divisions of labour in the home, with his sister and mother wholly responsible for all household tasks. In analysing how narratives of domesticity are commodified by individual food producers, the significance of ‘traditional’ home-based practices and narratives of domesticity are acknowledged. For each of these producers the spaces and practices of domesticity are central to constructing their gendered identities but in ways that are not given or straightforward.

In the four examples considered, the range of ways that domesticity is configured in the commercial sphere depends, in part, on the differences between the cultural and economic contexts of each producer’s life. Perween Warsi, for example, mobilises domesticity as a means of legitimising and explaining her commercial practices. For Warsi the domestic is deployed commercially to escape the confines of racialised femininity. The narratives of domesticity that constrain and produce Warsi as gendered and raced within the space of the home paradoxically facilitate her commercial endeavours. Rosamund Grant, by contrast, self-consciously reconfigures narratives of domesticity in ways that enable her to articulate and practice her race and class politics in her commercial business. Grant actively questions and then reworks ‘traditional’ meanings and politics of domesticity as a means of politicising her work with food. Nigella Lawson, the self-styled ‘Domestic Goddess’, engages with domesticity as a self-acknowledged form of parody. Lawson recognises that the domestic is a complicated and contested terrain – potentially the space of as much resentment and anger as warmth.
and love. Lawson’s mobilisation of the domestic as parody suggests a nostalgic longing for the idealised rather than actual practices and spaces of the home. The paradox of Lawson’s performance of idealised domesticity is that although it enables and allows for forms of arguably subversive feminine pleasure, Lawson finds herself constrained and contained by the domestic from which she seeks to escape through parody and fantasy. Finally, I consider Deepak Sharma’s vicarious appropriation of his mother’s domestic skills as a means of promoting the M&S Indian food range and his own career. Analysis suggests that narratives and practices of domesticity are not only central to Sharma’s vision for commercial success but also to the ways in which his autonomy and identity as a second generation Asian man are imagined and configured. In other words, Sharma’s appropriation of ‘traditional’ domesticity as embodied by his mother is a means by which he envisages facilitating the freedom, movement and autonomy of young Asians like himself.

‘Traditional’ associations and meanings of domesticity may be appropriated, reworked, parodied or vicariously deployed in the commercial sphere. Each of these commercial strategies works by drawing from and constructing gendered, racialised and classed narratives of domesticity across a number of different and related scales. Using Butler to think through the commodification of domesticity in relation to food producer life stories allows for a reading that (re)configures static notions of home and work and the performances of gender that are constituted within these spaces.

Butler’s work focuses on the compulsory order of gender, sex and sexuality and questions the assumption that sex is a biological category onto which gender construction is mapped:

\[ \text{Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “a natural sex” is produced and established as “prediscursive,” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts. (Butler, 1990: 7)} \]

For Butler, the embedding of gender identities in the body is a social process rather than historical or biological fact. Gender is thus ‘performative’ in as much as the daily repetition of gender reproduces the fiction of binary sex. Though food, cooking and domesticity may appear distant from Butler’s key concerns, I suggest that because spaces, narratives and practices of domesticity function to produce and situate
gendered/sexed identities, her critical analysis of gender performance and performativity is by no means incompatible with the focus of this chapter. Everyday practices and performances of domesticity reinscribe and reproduce gender positions within the home. Performances of ‘traditional’ domesticity, therefore, play a key role in situating and producing women and men in what Butler conceives to be a heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990: 12 & 151n6).

As Laurie et al explain, performance is understood by Butler, not as an act of agency or will, but as a form of repetition that reinscribes already known practices (Laurie et al, 1999):

Individual biological women are involved in the construction and contestation of femininity, through different means and drawing on different repertoires or resources. This is then performed in the contexts of individuals’ daily lives. Yet the carrying out or acting out of particular sets of ideas about how women are to behave and be is not as voluntaristic as the term ‘performance’ might suggest. The lives of individuals are clearly constructed within economic, political and social structures through which dominant femininities (and masculinities) are determined. Individuals are thus positioned, and position themselves, in particular ways in relation to dominant discourses and practices of gender identities. Individually, or collectively, they may be complicit, subverting and/or critical. They may also locate themselves or be located in relation to other forms of identification, not simply gender identities. (Laurie et al, 1999: 4)

Domesticity is understood to be a performative element of the complex map that constructs gender – that simultaneously produces and holds gender in its place. In other words, one way that gender relations are produced is through the repeated practices or performances of domesticity, of which cooking and food are central elements. The four different case studies considered in this chapter suggest that the performatve narratives of domesticity may be appropriated in the commercial sphere with different degrees of self-consciousness and in ways that might be subversive, complicit or parodic. This section examines how ‘traditional’ domestic narratives can reinforce or challenge existing sets of social relations and dominant versions of masculinity and femininity (that intersect with other aspects of identity such as race and ethnicity) if articulated outside of the space of domesticity.

In thinking through the politics involved when producers mobilise discourses of domesticity, I look towards the description of subversion offered by Butler:
[S]ubverting and displacing the naturalised and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender trouble, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilisation, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity. (Butler, 1990: 33-34)

In rejecting a notion of subversion that offers a 'utopian beyond', Butler recognises the possibility of subversion in a range of different, perhaps even everyday, practices. In one sense, narratives of domesticity that conjure up nostalgic notions of women as 'mother', 'nurturer' and 'the heart' of the home 'support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power'. However, when we begin to think of the spaces these discourses refer to and the spaces they are performed in we can begin to think though them as a form of 'subversive confusion'. Butler has argued:

If the regulatory fictions of sex and gender are themselves multiple contested sites of meaning, then the very multiplicity of their construction holds out the possibility of a disruption of their unequivocal posturing. (Butler, 1990: 32)

While the performance of domesticity may be constitutive and regulatory, changes in the spaces of these performances may emphasise those 'foundational illusions of identity' that attempt to connect women with domesticity in a linear, 'naturalised' continuum. Divorced from the home and reproduced in commercial spaces through processes of enclaving and diversion, discourses and practices of domesticity call into question their alleged relations with traditional constructions of gender and their relation to the family, the home, the body and the nation.

5.5.1 The Appropriation of Domesticity

I now want to explore the way in which Perween Warsi's appropriation of the domestic in the realm of commercial food production relies upon racialised notions of gender and their relation to the home and family. Moreover, the centrality of Warsi as symbolic 'mother' of the 'family' firm demonstrates the connections between embodied notions of motherhood, symbolic imaginings of the 'family' and the ways that 'Indianness' are constructed. That embodied narratives of domesticity are central to Warsi's commercial practices may be understood as a form of diversion by an entrepreneurial individual. This diversion, moreover, both brings into question and also produces 'traditional' narratives and practices of domesticity that are conventionally imagined to exist in an enclaved, non-commercial sphere. Warsi's commercial success, constituted as it is

168
through the appropriation of 'traditional' narratives of domesticity, is not understood, however, as being a form of 'rebellion.' Nevertheless, drawing from Butler's notions of gender subversion I want to suggest that the specific form of Warsi's commodification of domesticity potentially brings into question and unsettles 'traditional' constructions of gender and as such is potentially subversive.

For Warsi, raised in India by a wealthy Muslim family in the 1950s, the learned practices of domesticity and especially cooking were the everyday repeated acts of 'becoming' a woman. In the following extract Warsi starts describing how she 'helped' in the family kitchen and segues into an explanation about how 'helping' is part of a wider cultural expectation for girls:

Polly: When you say you were involved in the kitchen who were you working with, would you help the chef?
Warsi: I thought I was helping the chef! Yes we used to go help chef or if my mum was there we'd go, I used to go very, very often everyday to do something and as girls you're supposed to do that anyway, that's part of the culture, and that if, you know, as girls you, your responsibility is to go and help your mum and get involved in cooking and learn your cooking so when you get married you could do the same thing for your husband and learn to do the household jobs and things like that. So that was understood without saying it, that it was part of your role and something you have to learn and have to be very good at it as well because you are judged on that so you just, just do it.  

Warsi’s account of being a girl configures the space of the home and practices of domesticity as networks of power that situate and define gendered subject positions. In other words, 'being' a girl is 'learned' through repeated practices and discourses of the domestic space. 'Helping' and 'learning' to cook are daily, iterated reminders of the cultural expectations and assumptions that traditionally determine the parameters of a girl's life – getting married and looking after a husband and family. Moreover, Warsi explains that the domestic narratives and practices she describes are 'part of the culture' of her Indian Muslim upbringing. Narratives and practices of domesticity produce Warsi not only as a gendered but also as a raced and ethnically inscribed subject.

Warsi describes the role of 'being' a girl and woman as a form of performance - domestic practices are staged within specific spaces (the home) and for specific

---

10 Interview with Perween Warsi, born in Bihar, India, 1956, food manufacturer, recorded by Polly Russell, 28.6.00, Tape 1 Side A, tape reference C821/37/01
audiences (family, mother and husband) by whom 'you are judged.' The performance staged here, however, is not a performance of choice or a voluntary act. Instead, Warsi's performance can be explained with reference to Butler's descriptions of gender performativity (Butler, 1993). As Nicky Gregson and Gillian Rose explain, performativity is the means by which gender difference is made to appear 'natural':

Performance - what subjects do, say, 'act out' - is subsumed within and must always be connected to, performativity, to the citational practices which reproduce and subvert discourse, and which at the same time enable and discipline subjects and their performances. (Gregson & Rose, 2000: 441)

In this light, everyday and repeated acts of domesticity described by Warsi are those 'citational' practices that produce the discursive practices of gender and race. To describe Warsi's engagement with domesticity as a performance, therefore, does not assume a pre-existing self-cognizant subject, an 'other' version of Warsi behind the mask of performance. In other words, the performance undertaken by Warsi is one that cannot transcend the spaces and practices in which it is embedded. Warsi's performances in this instance must be understood as being inextricably 'subsumed within' and 'connected to performativity' - the reproductive networks of power and the spaces that they are constituted within - in this case cooking in the home for an Indian Muslim family.

Though it is not possible for Warsi to transcend the discursive practices that situate her as a gendered and raced subject she is able to reflect critically upon the experience of 'becoming' and of 'being' a woman:

Warsi: From a very early age I just felt that the way women are being treated, the way they are not allowed to do things without their husbands, first without their parents' permission and then without their husband's was wrong, that was just my belief.12

10 Interview with Perween Warsi, born in Bihar, India, 1956, food manufacturer, recorded by Polly Russell, 28.6.00, Tape 1 Side A, tape reference C821/37/01
11 In acknowledging 'judgment' as a constitutive element of the performance of gender, Warsi's description might be compared with Foucault's (1977) analysis of 'the gaze' as a tool of disciplinary power:
There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising surveillance over and against himself. (Foucault, 1977: 155)
12 Interview with Perween Warsi (2001) Tape 3 Side A C821/37/03
Warsi is aware that women are disciplined and subjected through their relations to others in families and these relations are constituted, in large part, by the narratives and practices of domesticity. That women must seek ‘permission’ before they are able to ‘do things’, before they are able to act, configures women in a position of negotiation.

It might seem straightforward to assume that Warsi’s commercial ambition and success is an indication of her rejection of stereotypical gender roles, a refusal to be constrained within the home and in relation to a family. Warsi’s commercial success might be read positively and in a celebratory manner as an example of subversion. She might be seen to have challenged and exceeded the normal limitations experienced by women, particularly women from her community. To understand Warsi’s commercial endeavours as subversive, however, is complicated by her reliance on the regulatory and normative narratives of domesticity. Warsi’s commercial success as a large-scale food manufacturer relies, in part, on the gendered performances of domesticity - learned in the space of the home - being mobilised as a means of explaining and legitimising her commercial enterprise. In other words, Warsi’s narration of her manufacturing business is constituted by and saturated in the narratives and practices of domesticity.

The connection between Warsi’s business and narratives of domesticity occurs in a number of different ways. First, her company ‘S&A Foods’ is named after her two sons, Sadiq and Abdul – “they are the name” she insists. The identity of the company - the way it is framed - is an implicit reminder of Warsi as mother. Second, when describing the business over the course of a number of recorded interviews Warsi compared the organisational structure to a family in a way that configured her employees as family members:

*Polly: How would you describe S&A as a business?*

*Warsi: The philosophy is based on family, they are the family of S&A Foods, I have a lot of feeling for people, I feel very strongly that they should be respected, that they should be encouraged, they should be listened to and involved and if you do that why shouldn’t they feel the same way?*

By repeatedly drawing upon the analogy of the family in describing her business, Warsi constructs herself as matriarch facilitator. Warsi, one of the country’s most wealthy business-persons, was at pains to depict herself as an ‘ordinary’ woman. On one

---

13 Interview with Perween Warsi (2001) Tape 3 Side A C82137/03
occasion she insisted, 'I'm a person, I'm a mum and a wife who goes shopping and spends time with the family and it's a good balance.' On another she stated in reference to the women who work in her factories, 'I'm one of them, I'm nothing special.' In drawing attention to her 'normal' and 'ordinary' status Warsi underplays her achievements in a way that obfuscates the potentially unsettling power she has as owner of a multimillion pound business and the employer of over 1300 people.

Moreover, by focussing on her role as wife and mother and by emphasising her skills as a listener and facilitator Warsi mobilises culturally constructed associations between women's 'natural' ability to care and nurture that characterises traditional imaginings of domesticity (DeVault, 1991). In suggesting that her commercial success is bound up with women's 'natural' abilities, Warsi also acknowledges the significance of her ethnicity and, paradoxically, her entrepreneurial spirit:

Polly: Do you think that is more to do with you as an entrepreneur or you as a woman?
Warsi: Well both, no three things. One is being a woman so I am more passionate about those sorts of things and the softer side of the business and also the women by nature can juggle many balls at one time, naturally learn how to manage family and how to keep the family together so that helps a great deal and I think it's a tremendous strength and the other thing has helped is my own Indian background and the family, the very strong family culture that we come from and the values of that has very high score compared to other material stuff so that played a very vital role of respecting others and how you communicate with them so that played a major role and being an entrepreneur which means I'm free to think the way I think rather than in a box, I don't believe in a box, I don't believe there is a box or that we need to get out of the box.

In using terms such as 'passionate', 'softer' and 'nature' Warsi associates herself with embodied stereotypes of gender and their relation to 'managing' and caring for a family. Moreover, Warsi insists that her commercial success is connected to the values learned in the specific cultural context of her Indian family. In mobilising domestic narratives in the commercial sphere Warsi draws from discourses of gender and ethnicity and their intersections. Narratives of domesticity appropriated by Warsi thus connect the S&A business with embodied notions of gender and ethnicity as well as with idealised and racialised constructs of the family. Warsi's claim that her success is due to her 'natural' abilities as a woman and the cultural values that make her Indian as well as her

14 Interview with Perween Warsi (2001) Tape 2 Side AC821/37/02
15 Interview with Perween Warsi (2001) Tape 1 Side B C821/37/01
16 Interview with Perween Warsi (2001) Tape 3 Side A C821/37/03
entrepreneurial spirit seems paradoxical. Gender practices, as she notes, limit women. The shared ‘values’ that have a ‘high score’ in Indian culture, therefore, are also a collective form of rules that might be understood to be constraining and restricting. The paradox of Warsi’s description is that while she embraces traditional narratives of domesticity that produce her within gendered and raced networks of power she also claims to be ‘free to think’ and act the way she chooses. Warsi negotiates a position where the very narratives that in one context are constraining are in another enabling. It is Warsi’s recognition of the necessity of mediating and mobilising seemingly incompatible subject positions that enables her ‘to do things’, to proceed with her commercial endeavours.

Warsi’s awareness of the precarious nature of this negotiation and her reliance upon the collaboration of others, in particular her husband, is clear:

Polly: How does your husband handle your success?
Warsi: He tries and one thing I must say, which I said early on in the interview that, em, if he was a typical Asian husband, he could have said ‘enough is enough you can do this but you can’t do the other’ and I have no choice but to stop because to me my family is very important and to me if that meant I was compromising on his happiness or family happiness and the environment depressed and unhappy then I would’ve stopped because that matters to me more. So I’m very fortunate that he did not do that and I had the chance to do things my way but it can’t be easy for him.17

Warsi’s repeated insistence that ‘family happiness’ and ‘the environment of the home’ are her primary concerns reflects her awareness of the negotiated position she inhabits. This is not to suggest that her desire to be a ‘good’ mother is disingenuous – being a ‘good’ mother she states is not about ‘choice’, is not a performance she can choose to reject, she is constituted by it and through it. Warsi’s description of how women in her community rely upon male or familial approval to move freely or take paid work would seem to imply that being a woman/wife/mother should be a barrier to her commercial ambitions. Paradoxically, however, it is because she emphasises her role as mother and wife, those identities that traditionally locate and produce women within domestic spaces outside of commerce, that she is able to gain her husband’s permission to continue her commercial practices. In other words, the centrality of narratives and practices of domesticity to Warsi’s business enables her to move from a purely domestic role into a commercial role.

17 Interview with Perween Warsi (2001) Tape 3 Side A C821/37/03
practices of domesticity to Warsi’s business enables her to move from a purely domestic role into a commercial role.

Warsi’s commercial venture, therefore, was embarked upon not *despite* but *because* of her role as wife and mother. Cooking is not only what Warsi was *able* to do (what she had learned from a young age), but what she was culturally *enabled* to do. In purely practical terms her career was made possible because of the cooking skills learned as a key practice of gender. Moreover, her international food manufacturing business started in the space of her home kitchen when she made a tray of samosas to sell at her local delicatessen. Warsi’s role as wife and mother were not, initially, interrupted by her cottage industry. This serves as a reminder that women’s paid work often takes place at the margins, around the everyday needs of a household and family. Warsi’s entrance into an economic sphere through the commercial transformation of the domestic space of her home involves her in a delicate negotiation between her entrepreneurial ambitions and the cultural expectations and limitations she experiences as a wife, mother and daughter.

The appropriation of narratives of domesticity make possible this negotiation and this is why she emphasises her role as ‘wife’ and ‘mother’ and describes the business as a ‘family’. A central feature of her appropriation of narratives of domesticity is the symbolic role played by the domestic space of the kitchen in Warsi’s life story and commercial practices. In a BBC documentary about Warsi she is shown standing in her original domestic kitchen prior to having her house remodelled.\(^{18}\) While recording her life story I started to ask Warsi to describe the ‘old’ kitchen depicted in the programme but before I could finish asking my question she interrupted me to explain how the extract made her feel:

*Polly:* In the shot where they showed your new house being built there was this symbolic moment where you went back into the kitchen where you started up the business making the samosas.

*Warsi:* Yes, that was wonderful it really brings back all the memories from when I started and how things used to be in the tiny little kitchen with five ladies crammed in and working away with hardly any room, hot burners going on in several places. It was quite interesting to go back in time and explain how things were.

*Polly:* Is the old kitchen part of the new house?

\(^{18}\) *Boss Woman* 24\(^{th}\) July 2000 BBC 2
Warsi: At one time I had the whole house knocked down to the floor and the only building that was standing was one small tiny kitchen because I would not allow that to be demolished because it has such sentimental value...the reason is it's a memory. Why do we preserve old palaces and churches and other historical places? For those reasons, have so much memories, em, attached to it for me and to my sons and my family that none of us wanted it to be demolished and it still there part of the house.\textsuperscript{19}

As Warsi makes clear, the domestic kitchen serves as a dramatic reminder of the humble origins of the business: the 'old' kitchen is therefore inextricably bound up with the heroic narrative of S&A Foods and with Warsi herself. In part, the commercial success of S&A foods is constituted through the space and relations of a domestic kitchen.

Warsi not only mobilises the domestic kitchen as part of her commercial practice in a narrative sense but also intends to physically move the 'old' kitchen into the factory:

Warsi: My plan is to use my original cooker that I have kept and my rolling pins and various other things that I used, I've kept them all. And we will have a small, like a, museum kitchen done here at head office where I could kit out a small kitchen where people could see where I started from.

\textit{Polly: Why is that important?}

Warsi: It just reminds you where you were, it tells you where you’ve come from so you don't forget, you know where you started from and where you started. It is quite easy to become quite arrogant and complacent...so that's a good reminder and also it's something nice to be proud of.\textsuperscript{20}

Warsi’s plan to build a replica of her original home kitchen in the middle of her factory serves as a vivid manifestation of how narratives and practices of domesticity are inextricably mixed up with her commercial practices. By recreating her old domestic kitchen in the space of her manufacturing plant, Warsi reminds herself and others that at the centre of the business is a housewife, a mother and a small home kitchen. Warsi thus associates herself and her factory with a range of 'traditional' gendered and raced relations associated with the spaces and practices of domesticity.

Despite her critique of traditional gender norms, Warsi’s mobilisation of narratives of domesticity depends upon the appeal of nostalgic ideals of traditional spaces and gender roles that are productive and reproductive of unequal gender politics. The narratives and practices of domesticity evoked by Warsi in her commercial businesses refer back to

\textsuperscript{19} Interview with Perween Warsi (2001) Tape 7 Side A C821/37/07
\textsuperscript{20} Interview with Perween Warsi (2001) Tape 7 Side B C821/37/7 F9113
those very practices that have subjected women within and through traditional networks of power. So to read Warsi’s success as in some way subversive in itself is difficult because her personal and commercial freedom are constituted through the paradoxical mobilisation of those narratives that construct traditional gender roles and the power differential between them as ‘natural’. I do not, however, want to abandon the idea that Warsi’s business practices might be read as subversive. Their subversive potential exists not despite its recourse to nostalgic ideals but, perhaps, because of the recourse to nostalgic ideals. In other words, it could be that when discourses and practices of domesticity are used by Warsi, this is an example of Butler’s vision of subversion made possible ‘through the mobilisation, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity?’ (Butler, 1990: 34).

Understanding Warsi’s mobilisation of domesticity in a commercial realm as subversive relies upon thinking through the significance of space and how it produces and is produced by social relations. Gregson and Rose argue that power creates not just social actors but the spaces in which they perform (2000). The power relations that create the domesticated woman at the heart of the kitchen, therefore, also create the domestic kitchen as a performance of gendered relations. If this is the case the hierarchies constituted and produced though the practices and narratives of domesticity are embedded in the physical location of the domestic kitchen.

According to Gregson and Rose, these hierarchies ‘can be challenged through working out in practice, through performance, of metaphors of margin and centre, margin in centre, centre in margin’ (Gregson & Rose, 2000: 446). The subversive potential of Warsi’s practices lies, therefore, in the appropriation of domesticating narratives and practices from the space of the home to the space of the factory. Clearly Warsi’s business practices complicate and challenge the ‘traditional’ boundaries between home and work – the domestic space is not only discursively imagined in the work space but is being physically recreated and moved into the centre of the factory. The idea of the domestic kitchen being placed in the centre of a factory is a form of staging and performance that potentially unsettles the imagined fixity of the space of work and home and the social relations constructed through them. Gregson and Rose suggest that a ‘source of performative instability is the blurring of clear distinctions between positions
and spaces’ (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 442). Warsi’s bringing together domestic narratives and the physical space of the kitchen into the factory might be understood as such a ‘blurring’ and as such a process of performative instability and slippage.

This process is subversive not because, in Butler’s words, it offers a ‘utopian beyond’ (1990: 34) but because it unsettles and confuses the imaginary ideal of domesticity that is taken to be normative, natural and static. In other words, through comparisons with the ideal of domesticity the limitations, rigidity and fragility of conventional gender practices are exposed. Warsi’s life story and business practices suggest that women food producers can recite the performative narratives of domesticity to entitle them to a place in the economic and public sphere. The citation of these definitions within commercial spaces, however, cannot be simple or straightforward copies or replicative events and as such bring into question the discourses and practices they appear to represent.

5.5.2 Narratives of Domesticity Reworked and Reclaimed

The commodification of domesticity undertaken by Warsi involves an embrace of traditional associations between women, the home, cooking and the family. Nostalgic ideals of domesticity that produce and naturalise gendered and raced social relations are not directly shaped or challenged by Warsi - they are challenged by being invoked and mobilised in unexpected places. For Rosamund Grant, however, cooking commercially involves a direct reclamation and reworking of domestic narratives, practices and spaces that her family regards as irrelevant and low status. Like Warsi, Grant from an early age was expected to acquire domestic skills and assist her mother with cooking. While for Warsi these skills were anticipated to encompass the entire scope of a woman’s life, for Grant they were considered to be necessary but ancillary requirements to a career in teaching. As Grant notes in the introduction to her first cookery book, while she was a young girl her father would warn her to improve her school-work or she ‘would end up in the kitchen cooking for her brothers and sisters’ (Grant, 1988: 5). Grant’s father’s anxieties about his daughter’s future prospects highlight the traditionally low status of domestic skills and, more specifically, the historically low status of black domestic workers. Domesticity and cooking are not highly valued by Grant’s middle-class Guyanese family because they are reminders of the material effects of race and class inequalities. For Grant, therefore, the politics involved in cooking commercially are dramatically different to those of Warsi.
A mother with two children, Grant’s commercial involvement in cooking started after and as a result of the break up of her marriage. Beginning by selling vegetarian food at a market and eventually opening an Afro-Caribbean restaurant, Grant ensured her economic and emotional independence from her husband and extended family. Grant articulates her cooking as a political practice:

Polly: Did you feel you had something to prove when you started teaching cooking?
Grant: Yeah, I did because cooking isn’t something that goes down well as a career option. It’s not a serious career choice in my family and it’s deemed as something everybody should know how to do and what’s the talent in that? You know, you can cook and so what? And so I suppose there’s a funny part of me that just hooked onto the bit that’s more deviant behaviour, more rebellious teenager, young woman just thinking I’ll show you...I think if my parents had really encouraged me to take it as a career option I would’ve been more successful. What I’d like to do is have a ‘Cordon Black’ Cookery School, I’d like to have more black restaurants around, I’d like to advise black restaurants how to market home cooking more, these are the things I really care about.

Grant’s emphasis on herself as ‘rebellious’ and ‘deviant’ for cooking may seem overstated given that cooking is ‘something everybody should know’. Grant understands, however, that her decision to cook commercially is bound up with the gender and race politics that led, in part, to the end of her marriage. Grant’s growing awareness of feminist and race issues during the late ‘70s and early ‘80s led to her questioning her life as a housewife and her marriage to a white, middle-class, English man. Through cooking commercially Grant begins to reconfigure what it means to be mother, wife, daughter and sister – not as a wholehearted rejection of ‘traditional’ gender roles but rather as a reworking, a shift in emphasis and focus. In other words, by taking the decision to cook commercially Grant challenges the traditionally low status afforded the gendered and raced practices of domesticity.

This reconfiguration requires others – Grant’s family who she financially supports, the council who provide her with a financial loan and her friends who she employs - to take food and cooking seriously. Cooking thus becomes an integral part of a feminist, black and economic agenda. While her brothers Bernie and Leyland Grant enter the public stage of politics through their work with the Labour Party and trade unions, Rosamund

---

21 Interview with Rosamund Grant, born in Guyana 1956, cookery writer/restaurateur/psycho-analyst; recorded by Polly Russell 9.1.01, Tape 12 Side B, tape reference C821/35/12
Grant politicises the private space of food and cooking. Grant's commercial enterprise insists on the significance of 'traditionally' devalued women's work. While women have historically been responsible for enforcing and passing on culinary heritage via the practices associated with food in different cultures within the home, Grant attempts to mobilise this power in the 'public' commercial sphere. Grant's vision of running a 'Cordon Black' school of cookery is a desire to pass on cultural knowledge to future generations – the role women have conventionally performed within the domestic sphere. Asked why she wants to encourage more black people to cook she responds: 'Because our food culture is dying out here and a lot of the traditions are going and I want to see them growing, not going.'²² By cooking commercially Grant re-appropriates the task of passing on cultural heritage, and so performs a symbolic nourishing of her community.

The domestic sphere of cookery translated in a commercial arena thus provides Grant with a space where she can redefine her identity and practice her politics. While this process is, in her own words, 'deviant', this subversion cannot be understood outside of the spaces and practices being subverted. Grant's self-articulated 'deviance' is only made possible by the existence and prevalence of regulatory narratives of domesticity that produce gendered, raced and classed subjects. The politics of Grant's commercial cooking cannot be understood as being 'outside' or 'other' from the domestic space from which she has literally and symbolically moved. This becomes clear when Grant describes a typical day when she first started cooking commercially following the separation from her husband:

Grant: In the afternoon I had to be free by three to go back to Warner Road to pick up the kids from school and then I left them with the aupair and then I went off home. So I lived this sort of life that was put together, cooking at the centre, picking up the kids, leaving them behind, going back to my flat and that's how I lived for a while. And I taught in the evening and my husband gave me a small allowance because I couldn't work full time if I had to pick the kids up. So I put all that money together and I lived a very frugal life but I was independent and happy except for the fact I couldn't afford to have my children with me and they lived in my husband's house.²³

Mobilising the skills learned in childhood enables Grant to inhabit seemingly incompatible spaces and subject positions. Grant describes moving between and within

²² Interview with Rosamund Grant (2001) Tape 12 Side A, C821/35/9
²³ Interview with Rosamund Grant (2001), Tape 11 Side A C821/35/11
multiple places, having a life that is 'put together' rather than predetermined. Through cooking commercially Grant is able to move in and out of a number of different places and as such is able to perform a number of different, traditionally incompatible, roles. Grant's subversion of traditional gender roles is made possible, therefore, by her mobilisation of cooking - even though cooking is inextricably bound up and inseparable from gendered, classed and raced social relations. The subversive potential of Grant's commercial appropriation of cooking is found, therefore, in the paradoxical spaces opened up by her mobilisation of domesticity. In performing a domestic and maternal role for a wider community, Grant rejects a traditional configuration of mother and wife that locates her within the home, with low status work, without economic independence or political significance. Paradoxically, however, this rejection involves her insisting on the significance of the traditional gender roles, on the recognition of cooking as commercially justified and politically worthwhile in terms of race, class and gender. With a high degree of reflexivity Grant works to challenge the low status of the gendered spaces and practices of domesticity but in doing so must move out of domestic space into the public sphere. Thus for Grant the narratives and practices of domesticity reconfigured in different spaces and for different audiences, open up the possibility for different and potentially liberating power relations.

5.5.3 Parodying Domesticity

Unlike Warsi and Grant, Nigella Lawson's commercial mobilisation of domesticity is less the result of cultural constraint or force of personal, economic and political circumstances but instead a choice deriving, in part, from economic, cultural and educational privilege. Educated at Oxford University and the daughter of a former Conservative MP24, Nigella Lawson had a successful career as Deputy Literary Editor of the Sunday Times and as a columnist for The Observer and The Times prior to becoming a cookery icon.25 For many women, including Warsi and Grant, work associated with domestic practices is the only paid work available to them. By contrast, Lawson's commercial engagement with cookery and domesticity is not embarked upon because it is the only commercial practice that she is able or enabled to do. Lawson's privileged position makes possible a parodic engagement with idealised domesticity that depends

24 Nigel Lawson
25 Joanne Hollows notes that Lawson has 'gained an iconic status in the UK, becoming known simply by her first name like the UK's Delia (Smith) and the US Martha (Stewart)' (2002: 1).
on a high degree of reflexivity as well as the freedom to mobilise domesticity at will. 
Lawson’s commercial mobilisation of ‘traditional’ narratives of domesticity, therefore, 
highlight how class positions determine subjects’ different engagements with and 
experiences of domesticity.

While Warsi directly appropriates ‘traditional’ narratives of domesticity and Grant 
challenges and reconfigures ‘traditional’ narratives of domesticity, Lawson’s 
classical engagement with domesticity involves, amongst other things, self-conscious 
parody, irony and fantasy. These parodic performances take place in a number of 
different ways. In her second book, How to be a Domestic Goddess: Baking and the Art 
of Comfort Cooking, Lawson offers readers advice on how to inhabit an idealised world 
of domestic nostalgia through baking. Her intention, she explains in the introduction, is 
‘not being a domestic goddess exactly, but feeling like one’ (Lawson, 2000: vii). The 
parodic quality of Lawson’s television performances derives from the ways that she is 
shown, in different ways, to be acting out different roles and moods. As Joanne Hollows 
describes:

Her address to camera is frequently arch and flirtatious and peppered with quips: 
‘trust me, I’m not a doctor’, she says as she puts on rubber gloves to chop chillis, 
and ‘now I’m going to disrobe, de-rubber’ as she takes them off. (Hollows, 
2002: 3)

In a sense, Lawson puts the domestic on show – we see her putting on her make-up and 
changing in and out of different outfits to suit her mood. Lawson’s television 
programmes and the positions and personae presented in her books ironically and self-
consciously imitate and mock domestic stereotypes and ideals. In talking about the 
political implications of drag, Butler suggests that ‘drag implicitly reveals the imitative 
structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency’ (Butler, 1990: 137). As my 
exploration suggests, Lawson’s parodic and imitative engagement with domesticity 
brings into question ‘traditional’ narratives of domesticity and their relation to 
‘naturalised’ gender roles and reveals them to be both imitative and contingent.

As with Warsi and Grant, Lawson’s mobilisation of narratives of domesticity involves a 
blurring of the distinctions between her ‘private’ life and her commercial life. As she 
explained on our first meeting, ‘to some extent my living has been the subject of my
Lawson’s first book, *How to Eat*, for instance, was a cookery book and lifestyle ‘bible’ filled with references to her family, friends and daily routines (Lawson, 1999). Her subsequent three books similarly contain anecdotes and asides about Lawson’s ‘private’ domestic world. The blurring of boundaries between Lawson’s commercial practices and her ‘private’ life is made even more explicit in her two television series, *Nigella* and *Nigella Bites*. Primarily shot in the large open-plan kitchen and dining area in the basement of her house in Shepherd’s Bush in West London, Lawson invites the viewer, via the camera, into her private world to witness her everyday activities including bathing, going to bed and feeding her children and her friends.

This blurring of boundaries, moreover, is not limited to Lawson’s media representation or authorial self. Lawson’s life story interviews took place at her home over a period of three mornings. On each of these occasions a nanny, a food stylist, a television producer and various other people with unspecified roles were in Lawson’s house. The space of Lawson’s home and the everyday relations constituted in that space confuse ‘traditional’ delineations between work and home and public and private. The significance of Lawson’s commodification of domesticity and the blurring of boundaries between the public and private is the way that this brings into question not only her public performances of domesticity but idealised and nostalgic ‘traditional’ narratives of domesticity themselves.

In talking about the relation between her private experience of domesticity and her public performances of domesticity, Lawson draws from her childhood experiences. Lawson’s parodic mobilisation of stereotypical narratives of domesticity results from an awareness of domesticity as a complicated and contested site, the location of difficult family encounters and power struggles. When asked about the popular depiction of Lawson spending time with her mother and grandmother in the kitchen as a young girl, Lawson responded in the following way:

*Polly: I’ve read articles saying that you were brought up in the kitchen is that -*  
*Lawson: Yes, well my mother was a very good cook although, er, em, my childhood, I did spend a lot of time, my childhood is always made, people always want this sort of idyllic childhood. Funnily enough although I didn’t like eating I did like cooking. And I used to watch her, she was very up and down and when she was in one of her good moods so when we were cooking, or*

---

26 Interview with Nigella Lawson, born in London 1960, television chef/cookery writer/journalist, recorded by Polly Russell 4.12.01, Tape 2 Side B, C821/94/02
Sunday lunch we were all required to help, to make sauces but...she wasn’t a
kind of, she didn’t sit there whipping up wonderful things, we were just there
and we helped and it’s probably a much better way of learning how to cook. It
was for a reason. It wasn’t done to amuse the children.

*Polly: How does it make you feel when you get constructed in that way?*

Lawson: I obviously without meaning to help in that construction. But you know
the difficulty with childhood is that at different times you feel different things
about it and I must’ve felt, I must’ve felt happier in the cooking parts. I must’ve
felt busy and useful and appreciated in a way that I didn’t at other times.
Certainly I come from a very greedy family so certainly cooking would’ve been
a way of gaining approval, of giving pleasure...So I suppose there was a way
that food was pleasurable despite the fact I didn’t want to eat or I found meals
very stressful the whole providing of food must in some sense, and the fact that I
cooked with my grandmother, must’ve been the best bits of childhood so I don’t
think it’s entirely dishonest or a process of trying to remodel something but that
must’ve seemed the best part. I don’t know, I’m just trying to remember,
although I was always terrified of my mother’s impatience, of doing something
wrong, I do remember getting, teaching me to make mayonnaise or making
béarnaise by the stove and being very tense and nervous that I would do
something wrong but on the other hand I think learning is satisfying...27

Lawson is aware that the public wants her to be associated with ‘this sort of idyllic
childhood’. Lawson’s interruption of my unfinished question suggests an impatience to
counteract this assumption. For Lawson, cooking and eating as a child were complicated
occasions involving both anxiety and pleasure. Lawson remembers herself in this
environment being ‘terrified’ and ‘tense and nervous’. On the other hand she
acknowledges cooking as ‘satisfying’ and at times ‘pleasurable’ and the kitchen as a
place where she felt ‘busy’, ‘useful’ and ‘appreciated’. Moreover, the kitchen of
Lawson’s childhood was sometimes a place to witness her mother’s ‘good moods’ but
was also a site of work rather than entertainment. Often Lawson’s mother ‘cooked with
resentment’ (see below) and the kitchen was the stage where family tensions – her
parent’s unhappy marriage - were played out. Rather than being a ‘natural’ or inevitable
location of family unity and maternal emotion, the kitchen and the practices associated
with it are subject to resistance, reluctance, negotiation and resentment.

In Lawson’s descriptions, domesticity emerges as a paradoxical and complicated space.
Lawson’s performance of idealised domesticity involves reflexively negotiating the

---
27 Interview with Nigella Lawson (2001) Tape I Side B, C821/94/01
difference between nostalgic ideal and actual experience. Constructing herself in the role of a domestic goddess, therefore, Lawson plays with a stereotype very different from her own experience. Reflecting on why ‘people’ like to imagine she had an ideal childhood Lawson understands that her domestic goddess persona facilitates a shared fantasy:

Polly: Why do you think people want to construct an idyllic version of your childhood?
Lawson: Because I think for them I represent something. Somehow by attributing it to me they feel they can share in it. So many people didn’t have that they somehow want to imagine it for themselves. I always say to people this modern thing that cookery should be pleasurable but often it can’t be and my mother was a wonderful cook but she cooked resentfully a lot of the time, it isn’t really a question of, one can cook good food while seething with resentment, it doesn’t have to be all wondrous, joyous exercise. 28

Lawson thus puts to commercial use her awareness of the appeal of nostalgic fantasies associated with domesticity. Lawson’s performances are as much a parody of a domestic ideal as they are a performance of a domestic ideal itself. As she explains, her audience want to attach her to a ‘sort of idyllic childhood’ in order to ‘feel they can share in it’, although (and because) ‘so many people didn’t’ have that.’

In providing a critical examination of Lawson as ‘post-feminist’, Joanne Hollows argues that she negotiates the opposition between feminist and housewife through fantasy:

The position of the domestic goddess presented by Lawson is not simply a pre-feminist figure of femininity, a throwback to a ‘real’ past, but instead offers a point of feminine identification that responds to the contradictions of the present. (Hollows, 2002:10)

The contradictions Hollows speaks of concern anxieties around time scarcity and changing attitudes towards work and leisure. But Lawson’s commercial appropriation of narratives of domesticity also mediates the difference between experiences of the past and imaginings of the past. Butler’s descriptions of gender as performative helps suggest the political implications of the relation between Lawson’s experiences of domesticity and her performances of domesticity: ‘The parodic repetition of the original...reveals the original to be nothing more than a parody of the idea of the natural and the original’ (Butler, 1990: 31). As Lawson’s descriptions of her childhood make clear, there is no original of the idealised fantasy of domesticity. Lawson’s parodic public performances

28 Interview with Nigella Lawson (2001) Tape 2 Side A C821/94/02
of domesticity repeatedly emphasise the fiction of ‘traditional’ domesticity and, by implication, the gendered social relations imagined to be constituted there.

Ironically, if Lawson’s parodic performances of idealised domesticity derive, in part, from an experience based recognition of the problems, limitations and anxieties associated with domesticity, this realisation, nor the resulting performance, enables her to surpass being constrained within and by the domestic. Lawson’s performances of the fantasy of domesticity rely upon heteronormative practices that have disciplined and constrained women within the space of the kitchen. Being able to parody and mimic these narratives and practices is arguably more readily available to those with cultural and economic capital than those without. Significantly, however, Lawson is frustrated by the way her fame as a cook has impacted on her other work. On one occasion when the tape recorder was turned off, Lawson said she did not want to ‘talk about bloody fairy cakes’ for the rest of her life and during an interview she said, ‘I’m not really interested in just being about recipes’.

Lawson’s mobilisation of her domestic space and her performance of idealised domesticity are enabling as forms of fantasy and escape but limiting in that they are inevitably bound up with the unequal politics of gender. In other words, Lawson is caught in a network of power which reproduces certain authoritative definitions of subject positions and places – despite her relative power and privilege.

It is, however, the distance between an ideal and reality that opens up the subversive possibilities of Lawson’s performance as one that brings into question the fiction of domesticity as a shared, universal or knowable practice. Lawson’s commodification of the domestic might be understood as subversive, within certain limits, because it highlights the fantasy of idealised domesticity and because it blurs the distinctions between positions and spaces – public and private and home and work. Lawson’s performance must be understood as a parody for which she acknowledges there is no original. Moreover, as far as it exists, the ‘original’ is already inflected by idealisation. Lawson performs the ideal of domesticity like a drag act.

29 Interview with Nigella Lawson (2001) Tape 2 Side A C821/94/02
30 There are, however, significant differences between Lawson’s performance of domesticity as a form of drag and ‘conventional’ drag. While Lawson’s performances may be read as being subversive because they bring into question ‘natural’ constructions of idealised domesticity and by association gender norms, ‘conventional’ drag subverts gender norms through the transgressive act of unsettling naturalised ‘male’ and ‘female’ identities.
norm is potentially subversive and confusing because through comparisons with the fantasised ideal of domesticity conventional gender practices are brought into question and exposed. 31

5.5.4 The Vicarious Appropriation of Domesticity

Unlike Warsi, Grant and Lawson, M&S Food buyer Deepak Sharma does not directly commodify himself through his own embodied associations with domesticity but enacts a vicarious commodification through associations with his mother. Significantly, while each of the other producers draws from and expresses their recognition of traditional domestic narratives and practices as contested and complicated, Sharma’s descriptions and imaginings of domesticity are less critical. In Sharma’s life story the domestic is established as the static counterpoint to the changing and dynamic lives of ‘second generation’ Asians. The gendered and raced domestic narratives that Sharma mobilises as part of his commercial strategy are inextricably related to how he articulates and imagines home, community and nation.

Sharma, the British born son of Indian parents, was bought up in a household where his mother and sister were responsible for all domestic tasks. Unlike Warsi, Grant and Lawson, therefore, Sharma was constituted as a gendered subject through his exclusion from rather than involvement with the tasks and responsibilities of domesticity. As noted previously, Sharma started work for Marks & Spencer as a clothes buyer and was moved into the food department as a consequence of internal business reorganisation. While recording his life story and also while talking ‘off tape’ Sharma professed that his interest in and knowledge about food was predominantly commercial.

31 Another area of Lawson’s enactment of the domestic ideal that raises questions about the subversive potential of her performances relates to the ways she is represented as always hungry and eating. Eating, as much if not more than cooking, is central to Lawson’s television persona – she is frequently filmed ‘secretly’ stealing food from the fridge, eating fat from a joint of beef or taking a bowl of pasta to bed with her at night, for example. At the opposite end of the scale, television chef Delia Smith, the woman held responsible for teaching the British to cook, is shown meticulously preparing and cooking but never eating food. Significantly, while Lawson’s first book and television series were called How to Eat, Smith’s most recent and most popular television series was titled How to Cook. That Smith is never shown consuming food is integral to the perception that she is capable and complete. Conversely, the emphasis on Lawson’s eating food establishes her as incomplete – filled with desire, needing to consume and be consumed. While Smith provides her audience with comforting and dependable reassurance – the promise of reliable and sensible recipes, Lawson’s cooking to taste and desiring to eat is a transgressive spectacle in which her audience can vicariously take part. The subversive potential of Lawson’s eating, however, is not simply a function of her desire but an implicit symbol that the domestic ideal her persona attempts to encapsulate is not entirely fulfilling. In other words, if being a ‘domestic goddess’ is so satisfying, why is Lawson perpetually hungry?
As I have discussed previously, to establish a position in the Indian food department and to further his career as a buyer, Sharma mobilises stereotyped associations between his Indian ethnicity and food. In other words although, by his own admission, Sharma has no particular specialist knowledge or practical experience of Indian food, he establishes himself as the 'natural' person to manage the Indian food range. Sharma thus mobilises embodied associations between ethnicity and particular foods. In doing so Sharma suggests that M&S make use of his mother’s skills as part of a commercial strategy to improve and market M&S Indian food to Asian customers. Describing a meeting with the Ready Meals Executive, Sharma explains his plan for attracting an untapped Asian market:

Sharma: I went to see the Executive primarily with my focus being now you are missing out on an Asian customer here but also to say ‘do you want some help with your Indian curries because you’ve got an Indian person here with an Indian household and I would love to help and don’t ever forget that you pay Indian consultants thousands of pounds, give the curry to my mum, she’s there and she’s free.32

Sharma suggests that associating Marks & Spencer Indian food products with his Indian mother will facilitate the inclusion of Asian customers into a predominantly white retail space. Sharma’s lack of skills or knowledge of Indian food derives, in part, from his gendered and raced exclusion from domestic practices at home. By contrast, Sharma’s mother is constituted through her embodied relation with narratives and practices of domesticity and so is invoked to vicariously authenticate and legitimise M&S products for ‘Asian’ customers and, by association, legitimise Sharma. By suggesting he act as a conduit, Sharma associates himself with his mother’s embodied domestic expertise. Sharma attempts to use his ethnic culture, as embodied by his mother, as a form of capital to promote his own career and the Indian food range. Indian food, therefore, is constituted through discourses of race and gender via Sharma’s vicarious appropriation of narratives of domesticity.

In suggesting that his mother become a ‘free’ consultant for the Marks & Spencer Indian food range, Sharma commodifies the knowledge and skill of his mother and the unpaid work she does in the domestic sphere. The conceptual possibility if not viability of this plan relies upon Sharma’s understanding of the economic relation between the spaces

---

32 Interview with Deepak Sharma, born in Leicester 1973, food buyer; recorded by Polly Russell 24.8.00, Tape 2 Side A; tape reference C821/39/02
Sharma's imaginings of the 'home', constituted through embodied imaginings of his mother, are configured as beyond the commercial realm, static and 'there'. Paradoxically, however, Sharma's 'traditional' and stereotypical descriptions of home and his mother are bound up with the ways that he imagines and describes his relation to the community, the nation and the future. Sharma's mother and the home function as a symbolic and nostalgic ideal at a time when many young Asians are moving from home and young Asian women have careers. The symbolic ideal of motherhood and its relation to the home is both an agent of transformation as well as nostalgia. This becomes clear when Sharma outlines in more detail why Marks & Spencer should target Asian customers:

Sharma: If you take me as a typical Asian person who is doing something with my life because I am quite typical in all honesty because I'm a young Asian lad who's done something with his life, has moved away from home to a predominantly white areas not worried about living in Hounslow because there are loads of Asians there. I'm worried about finding a nice property that's within my budget, having a nice standard of living, eating whenever I like, socialising whenever I like and working obviously and getting to see my family and what's happening more and more is you're getting young Asian people, especially in the second generation whose parents are first generation from India, who are wanted places like M&S to provide them with home cooking because they are not getting it anymore. And less and less you're finding young Asian people, and I use women here because traditionally they are the people who cook, but young Asian ladies are forgetting how to cook Indian food and you are getting young men who are living singly away from home, working in places like London, living a hundred miles away from their home and wanting M&S curries as a substitute to what their mothers make. You've then got the young couples who's wife has probably forgotten how to make Indian food, can make them but the lad's sitting there thinking crikey if only she could make curries like my mum kind of thing and again they are probably looking for Indian substitutes as well. 33

33 Interview with Deepak Sharma, (2000) Tape 2 Side A, C821/39/02
For Sharma, ‘doing something’ with his life is articulated in spatial terms. Sharma describes achievement in relation to leaving the space of domesticity when he ‘moved away from home’. This move is not only about leaving the family but also the Asian community – moving from an Asian area ‘to a predominantly white area’. Integral to the appeal of this transition is the freedom it affords economically, socially and gastronomically. Sharma’s depiction of the ‘second generation’ Asians who are ‘doing something’ with their lives is one that emphasises spatial movement and access to lifestyle choices. But Sharma’s description of ‘doing something’ is not straightforwardly positive because it inevitably involves a nostalgic longing for that which has been transcended. Movement and change, he explains, involve a loss, articulated here as ‘Asian ladies forgetting how to cook’ or young ‘lads’ longing for their mother’s cooking. Ready meals are crucial in facilitating young Asians ‘doing something’ because they mediate the transition from living at home within a family among the Asian community to moving away and beyond the practices of traditional domesticity. The commodification of narratives of domesticity potentially appeals to consumers’ nostalgic sense of loss while making possible their geographical, economic, cultural and generational transformation. The private spaces and practices of the domestic and, by association, the mother, are configured as static, fixed and implicitly passive and set up against the depiction of life for those who are ‘doing something.’ Paradoxically the symbolic mother and idealised domestic space are central to Sharma’s discursive explanation of contemporary and future Asian life.

This extract, therefore, indicates the ways that the ‘traditional’ home is inextricably bound up with constituting notions of community and its relation to the nation. Sharma’s quest to increase the number of M&S Asian customers is commercially inspired but it is also connected to the ways in which he imagines and describes the ‘place’ of young Asians in Britain. The trends Sharma outlines - in particular Asians moving to ‘predominantly white areas’ and valuing ‘having a nice standard of living’ - are ways that young Asians have ownership of and a ‘place in’ contemporary multicultural England. Food and domestic narratives mediate the symbolic and practical effects of the distance between ‘being at home’ and ‘living singly, away from home, in London, living 100 miles away’. Sharma’s attempt to connect the embodied knowledge of his mother and the space of home into the commercial sphere emphasizes how all performances and spaces are interrelational, overlapping and leaky. Deepak’s
performance as buyer is related to and constituted by the domestic performance of his mother. The commercial space of M&S is constituted through and in contrast to the spaces and practices of the 'traditional' home and family. Sharma's description ties together embodied notions of mother (that are racially and generationally inscribed), the gendered and raced practices of the 'traditional' Indian home and family security and community (Hounslow) in imagining his place in a Britain that is contemporary, urban and multicultural.

5.6 Summary
For the most part the contingency of the domestic has been examined in relation to the practices and spaces of the home. In analysing the deployment of the domestic in the commercial sphere, my analysis adds to work highlighting the fiction of 'traditional' domesticity as a 'natural' practice. My examination of food producer life stories and commercial practices unsettles theoretical readings of domesticity and women's relation to food which are constrained within or limited to the spaces of the home. Moreover, although previous work has considered the phenomenon of fictional character branding in the food industry, less attention has been paid to the processes by which food producers mobilise elements of their gendered identities as a form of commodification to enhance the appeal of food products. As with ethnic stereotypes associated with multicultural culinary culture, gendered stereotypes of domesticity can be appropriated as a form of capital through the emotional projection of the 'self' into the work space. Narratives of domesticity can be commercially appropriated from a range of positions with varying degrees of reflexivity and which allow for a range of practical (political) outcomes.

In each of these examples the practices and spaces of commercial food production are constructed and narrated through the discursive presence of the spaces and practices of domesticity. This brings into question how seemingly disparate spaces and practices and the social relations constituted within them are relationally and relatively configured. More specifically, my exploration suggests that while some commercial performances of domesticity are conducted with a high degree of reflexivity, even those more 'innocent' engagements highlight the constructed and contingent fiction of domesticity and its relation to 'traditional' gender roles. Butler suggests that 'the notion of gender parody...does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate.'
Indeed the parody is of the very notion of the original’ (Butler, 1990: 138). The commercial appropriation of nostalgic narratives of domesticity may, on first analysis, appear to reinstate the ‘traditional’ relation between particular spaces and the gender roles constructed therein. I hope, however, that my examination of food producer life stories demonstrates that narratives of domesticity reconfigured in the commercial realm highlight ‘traditional’ domesticity as spaces and practices for which there can be no ‘real’ or ‘original’.

In the previous chapter I suggested that the prevalence of narratives of multicultural culinary culture, especially the focus on ‘ethnic’ and ‘foreign’ food, is inextricably bound up with the politics of identity at a range of scales. In particular, these multicultural narratives suggest ways that contemporary England is discursively and imaginatively constructed in opposition both to ‘other’ people and places and the idealised places and social relations of the past. The appeal of narratives of multiculturalism cannot be disassociated from the appeal of narratives of domesticity that are reflective and productive of nostalgic ideals of past places and practices and social relations. In writing about the politics of identity in contemporary Britain, Morley and Robins argue that:

In the face of these transformations of our ‘home life’ calls for a return to ‘family values’ clearly articulate a profound sense of anxiety – they express a consistent cultural fantasy in which, if only we could go ‘home’, all would be well. (Morely & Robins, 2001: 11)

Narratives of domesticity are not only, therefore, bound up with the discursive practices of gender but of place and race and their intersections.

The pervasive appeal of nostalgic imaginings of domesticity in commercial food practices, also, reveals an anxiety pertaining to issues of identity but also of safety and health. More specifically, narratives of domesticity could be mobilised to mediate contemporary anxieties resulting from social change and in particular the increased reliance on manufactured food. Citing ideals of domesticity and associating food production with embodied maternal identities serves to make the products of mass manufacture more appealing, trustworthy and safe. In the following chapter I suggest that narratives of authenticity mediate anxieties about safety, contamination and mass manufacture that are bound up with anxieties about threatened identity. Given that
authenticating narratives highlight the home and the community as an imaginative ideal, they also inevitably and implicitly reify traditional gender constructions. Anne Hughes’ research on the lives of rural women, for example, notes that imaginings of ‘authenticity’ are primarily located at the ‘home’ and the ‘hearth’ in the hands of women (Hughes, 200: 126). In other words, narratives of authenticity are representative and constitutive of gender positions that symbolically naturalise women’s association with the home and with the practices of domesticity. Moreover, I analyse the use of authenticating narratives and suggest that tropes of authenticity such as ‘homemade’ and ‘traditional’ relate to the politics of cultural capital, class and Britishness. As I hope to demonstrate in the following chapter, therefore, narratives of domesticity, narratives of multicultural culinary culture and narratives of authenticity are mutually constituting.
CHAPTER 6

NARRATIVES OF AUTHENTICITY AND BRITISH CULINARY CULTURE

6.1 Introduction

This wasn't a display of olde worlde victuals, the theme-park preservation of British customs. It was an event celebrating real, tradition, home-grown, farm-baked and hand-crafted food. Our appetite for these specialities is growing, and their integrity and survival is being championed and safeguarded by farmers and producers dedicated to preserving and promoting them. (Caroline Stacey, 2002 'A Bit of Local Flavour, Please')

The sentiments expressed in this extract from an article about the future of traditional British food in *The Weekend Independent* encapsulate how authenticating narratives mediate popular anxieties raised by modern food production. Authenticating narratives and practices are mobilised against the imagined threat of a homogenised world to promise the duped consumer the 'real thing', confer a heroic status upon the small-scale producer or farmer and save the nation's threatened heritage. This trend is described by Brian Ilbery and Moya Kneafsey:

> Consumers, for example, are increasingly concerned to know where products come from and how they are produced, not only for 'health' and 'safety' reasons, but also in terms of satisfying a current 'nostalgia' which harks back to a perceived time of 'real' and 'wholesome' foods'. (2000b: 218)

An analysis of the politics underlying the appeal and popularity of authenticating narratives in the British food industry is the focus of this chapter. I contend that the academic preoccupation with the meanings and functions of multi-cultural food has led to insufficient attention being paid to a wider range of authenticating narratives and practices, despite their being a dominant and widespread feature of British food culture. Research to date has emphasised the contingent and constructed nature of authenticity but this has not led to a more full account of how authenticating narratives are utilised, why they are so prevalent and what they tell us about contemporary British food culture and identity practices in Britain (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Cook *et al.*, 1996, 1999; Lu & Fine, 1995).
Authenticating narratives and practices function at a number of different but related scales from the local through to the global. Cook et al. describe this in the following way:

This localism can work through the construction of a range of local cultures and cuisines worldwide. Or, at the same time, there can also be a strong element of nostalgic ‘internalised tradition’, in the form of culinary icons such as ‘traditional’ British roasts, game, and, inter alia, stews, sausages, and cheeses from a multitude of British regions. (Cook et al, 1999: 223)

Starting with the authenticating narratives mobilised in the production of Melton Mowbray pork pies, this chapter analyses a number of scales from traditional British, to mainstream Indian food and concluding with ‘fusion’ food. This analysis finds that in different contexts and in the hands of different agents authenticating narratives have specific meanings and functions – such as the connection made between rurality and Britishness connected with the Melton Mowbray pork pie. Despite the recognition of specificity, however, this chapter argues that there are over-riding themes and functions of authenticating narratives when deployed as part of the commercial production of food. An underlying premise of this analysis is that authenticating narratives are the practice and lived experience of nostalgia. Nostalgia is understood here to inevitably involve a painful recognition of distance and change and a longing to return. ¹

Authenticity, in this light, is the specific discursive and lived practice of generalised nostalgia. In recognising the centrality of nostalgia to authenticating narratives, it is argued that the mediating function of authenticity is a consistent and underlying feature of all authenticating narratives. Though each section in this chapter focuses on different examples in the food industry, these sections are cumulative rather than bounded, drawing out what might be specific or more prevalent at one scale but nonetheless recognising that the mediating function of authenticating narratives is consistent. While academic and governmental focus has highlighted authenticating narratives as a

¹ Rachel Laudan’s critique of what she terms ‘culinary luddism’ is extremely helpful in historically complicating simplified ideals of past food practices:

The Luddites’ fable of disaster, of a fall from grace, smacks more of wishful thinking than of digging through archives. It gains credence not from scholarship but from evocative dichotomies: fresh and natural versus processed and preserved; local versus global; slow versus fast; artisanal and traditional versus urban and industrial; healthful versus contaminated and fatty. (Laudan, 2001: 36)

Laudan suggests that the appeal of ‘tradition’ in culinary culture ignores historical evidence indicating that from being idyllic, food in the past was more likely to decay and contaminate, that it was unequally distributed and often produced through extremes of labour inequality, particularly the grinding toil of women.
prevalent element of the food industry in Britain, authentication has emerged as a theme in producer life stories. This chapter analyses the function and form of authenticating narratives both for food producers and for the food industry as entwined and mutually informing. It is the juxtaposition between the narrative and practices of authentication, the realities of food manufacture, and the life stories of food producers that this chapter explores.

The chapter is split into six thematic sections. The first (6.2) details the prevalence of authenticating narratives in the food industry. The second (6.3) focuses on a pork pie producer to argue for an understanding of authenticating narratives as negotiated and repeated performances. The final sections (6.4 – 6.7) examine the use of authenticating narratives and practices for four food producers involved in diverse areas of food production. First, by considering the manufacture of Melton Mowbray pork pies this section considers how authenticating narratives mediate commercial and personal anxieties about mass manufacture and commodification. Continuing to focus on pork pie production I then examine how authenticating narratives are related to the practices and politics of British identity. Next, I use extracts from the life story of a ‘champion’ of British food traditions to argue that authenticating narratives can be mobilised to perform and produce cultural capital. Moving then from the producer of ‘traditional’ British food culture to a buyer of Indian food for a multi-national the section demonstrates how for ‘ethnic’ food producers authenticity is configured as embodied and argues that this is subject to appropriation and mobilisation within a commercial context. In the final section alternative approaches to authenticity offered by two contemporary restaurateurs suggest further ways that authenticating narratives can be interpreted and appropriated as commercial strategy. This chapter will demonstrate how authenticating narratives are experienced and negotiated as lived experience and as part of individuals’ commercial relationship with food production. In recognising identity politics as contingent, ambivalent and unpredictable, this exploration rejects any rigid notion of authenticating narratives, arguing instead for a range of possible ways of thinking about how authenticity is imagined and experienced so as to complicate and add to existing research. Moreover, this chapter suggests that authenticating narratives involve the production of Britishness and its relation to discourses of gender, class and ethnicity and so draws together the arguments presented through the thesis.
6.2 The Prevalence of Authentication in the Practice of Food Production:

As others have noted, authentication, the institutional process of associating, locating and defining foods in relation to identities, practices and geographies of the past, is a key narrative and practice of the food industry in Britain (Cook et al., 1999; James, 1996). The widespread use of the term 'authenticity' in the food industry was highlighted in June 2001 when a report by the Food Advisory Committee (FAC)² suggested that stricter rules should govern the use of descriptive food terms. The report, prompted by concern about consumer confusion surrounding the use of the terms 'fresh', 'natural', 'pure', 'traditional' 'original', 'authentic' and 'home-made/farmhouse,' argued that clearer guidelines would provide consumers with better access to 'basic information to make informed choices about the food they wish to purchase'.³ The general conclusion of the FAC was that although 'fresh', 'authentic', 'traditional' etc are frequently deployed to describe food products, the terms are vague, meaningless and, at times, misleading. The FAC's attempts to define the appropriate usage for the various terms were themselves fairly vague, suggesting, for example, that for the word 'traditional,' 'the tradition should have existed for a considerable period of time,'⁴ or that 'authentic' should only be used to 'emphasise the geographic origin of a product.'⁵ The FAC's failure to provide definitive descriptions of meaning and application for these words points to the terms' shifting, constructed and negotiated nature.⁶

As the FAC's report highlights, authenticating narratives are bound up with a host of relational terms or tropes. In conjunction, it is argued, these tropes are enlisted both as part of producer narratives in the form of explanations, rationalisations and qualifications and are key elements of narratives and practices of the food industry. Some tropes include 'traditional', 'original', 'regional', 'seasonal', 'farmhouse', 'hand-

---

² Food Advisory Committee Review of the use of the terms Fresh, Pure, Natural etc. in Food Labelling 2001
³ Ibid p.4
⁴ Ibid p.35
⁵ Ibid p.40
⁶ Words such as 'fresh', 'natural' and 'pure' refer more directly to the biological nature of a given product and the degree to which it has been manufactured and preserved. By contrast, the terms considered in this chapter do not literally relate to the physical properties of the foods to which they refer but rather to the qualities associated with them via time/pace which may include methods of manufacture and specific ingredients.
crafted’ and ‘homemade.’ Each of these tropes invokes different emphasis so that, for example, the use of the term ‘regional’ implies both local expertise and a specialist practice associated with a particular place, while home-made refers to the imagined specificity of the ‘home’ rather than region or nation. But although each trope invites distinct geographical and historical connotations, a nostalgic imaginary of the past and of place is common to all authenticating tropes. Authentication, for the purposes of this analysis encompasses those tropes, narratives and practices of culinary culture that signify and reify a set of nostalgic, spatially and temporally imagined social relations that guarantee quality rooted in tradition.

Authenticating narratives of culinary culture are appropriated in the food industry in a variety of interconnected ways that may be explicit - packaging and promotional literature may include claims to authenticity stating, for example ‘Authentic pork pies from Melton Mowbray.’ Alternatively a product’s authenticity might be inferred by building on connections between places, ingredients and cookery as practice. An obvious example of this is the use of photography on food packaging or the themed styling of ‘ethnic’ restaurants – the faux washing used to simulate the ‘real’ streets of Naples in a pizza restaurant or the photographs of the Taj Mahal in Indian takeaways. The allusion to authenticity can, however, be worked through less straightforward associations. The ‘Red Dragon’ Chinese food range launched by M&S in 2000 was packaged in red and white ‘takeaway’ cartons that associated the products not so much with an ‘authentic’ imaginary of China but an ‘authentic’ association with Chinese takeaway. Moreover, groups and individuals are often configured in relation to authenticity. Restaurants are named after chefs or owners and ‘specialist consultants’ advise on retail food ranges so that the products of mainstream manufacture can associate with the ‘authenticity’ of a person’s identity and/or expertise. Authenticity also converges with the narrated-self when individual producers invoke tropes of authenticity to speak about their identity and their relationship with food. I understand this as an explanatory strategy of self-commodification and will talk about this in detail in the last section. Though it is recognised that authenticating narratives are primarily adopted and adapted for commercial agendas, authentication is not understood as only a commercial exercise but as one bound up with the internal practices and narratives of the food industry and individuals who work in it.
This analysis understands authenticity, paradoxically, as something created, conceived and imagined as part of an ongoing process rather than something knowable, definable or tangible. I share with Cook et al. an interest in:

An approach which does not position authenticity as a myth which some believers permanently ascribe to, and which some critics can come along and debunk, but as a negotiated ascription which is used and inhabited by food providers and consumers in particular social times and spaces. (1999: 239)

As with Cook et al., I am not interested in proving or disproving the ‘myths’ of authentication, but in exploring the function of authenticating processes for different food products and for those individuals involved in their production.

6.3 Authenticity as Performance

For Samworth Brothers’ Dickinson & Morris pork pies, narratives of authenticity are integral to the commercial viability and appeal of the brand. Using the life story of Stephen Hallam and the authenticating narratives mobilised by the D&M brand, this section examines the tension between narrative of authenticity and the practices of modern food production as lived experience. This section argues that the widespread appropriation of authenticating narratives in the food industry relates to anxieties raised by modern food production for consumers and also for individual food producers. These anxieties - about food safety, commodification, de-skilling and cultural dislocation - are articulated by elements of Hallam’s life story. It is argued here that authentication is appropriated, commercially and personally as a strategy to mediate and resolve these anxieties.

Dickinson & Morris is the name of a bakery in Melton Mowbray, the town historically associated with the ‘invention’ of the pork pie. Pork pies have been made on the ‘Dickinson & Morris Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe’ premises for over 150 years and today Dickinson & Morris remains the only bakery in the town producing pork pies (see figure 2). In 1996 five Melton Mowbray pork pie manufacturers from Leicester, including D&M, formed the ‘Melton Mowbray Pork Pie Association’ and initiated a campaign to claim ‘Protected Designation of Origin’ (PDO) status for the Melton Mowbray pork pie under EU legislation. The impetus for this action is explained on the D&M website:

For sometime the people of Melton Mowbray have been keen to seek ways to protect the envied reputation of their pork pies. A rising number of pork pies...
bear the town’s good name, however it has been discovered that they are not made anywhere in the vicinity.7

This explanation raises interesting questions, explored later, about exactly which ‘people’ or groups are invested in protecting the Melton Pork Pie and for what reasons. For now, however, this is a useful illustration of what Ilbery and Kneafsey describe as ‘cultural relocalization’:

There has been a renaissance of public interest in the United Kingdom in nature, nostalgia, local culture and culinary heritage. Society feeds on signs, symbols, dreams and imagination; thus naturally and locally-produced food can be seen as an expression of cultural identity. Such commoditization of local culture can help to (re)valorise place through its cultural identity.... (2000a: 317)

D&M pork pies, therefore, are part of a growing trend for acknowledging and protecting local British products and British food heritage8. Further, the attempt to gain legal protection is only one of many ways that D&M pork pies are associated with heritage. Dickinson & Morris pork pies are sold in white waxed paper with a red watchstrap label, a Dickinson & Morris crest and the words ‘Melton Mowbray’, ‘since 1851’ and ‘Traditionally Crafted pork Pie’ (see figure 3). The combination of paper rather than plastic-wrap, the typography and wording allude to practices and places of the past – the local shop where products were produced on-site, with each item individually wrapped in waxed paper at the time of purchase. Despite the rustic and old-fashioned appearance of the Dickinson & Morris pork pies the D&M brand is owned by Samworth Brothers. Samworth Brothers are a private food manufacturing conglomerate that employs a total of 4000 people, functions over a total of 12 sites across England and produces, amongst other things, sandwiches, cakes and ready meals for ASDA, Somerfield, Sainsbury’s, Co-op & Boots.9

In addition to owning the Dickinson & Morris brand, Samworth Brothers own Ginsters Cornish pasties. A 2001 advert in ‘Hello’ magazine for Ginsters pasties features a drawing of a part-artisan part-peasant figure. The figure holds a pasty and stands by a manifesto that appeals to those who are, ‘(b)ored of the big fast food dynasties and their

---

7 http://www.porkpie.co.uk/whoweare/mmppa.html
8 This trend includes the growth of farmers’ markets. Since the first farmers’ market started in Bath in 1997 the number has rises to 400. This trend looks likely to receive government backing following the January 2002 DEFRA Policy Commission on the Future of Food and Farming which highlighted the economic and cultural importance of regional food in Britain. (for press accounts of this see James, 2002; Stacey, 2002)
9 www.samworthbrothers.co.uk
global distribution networks' who instead 'want wholesome nourishment and the finest ingredients dragged from the earth with the mud still on them.' There follows an invitation to 'turn onto the road less travelled, take a seat at the wayside inn and order the Pasty of Kings.' (see figure 4). By implication, eating Ginsters pasties connects the consumer to the earth and to the traditional practices of the rural past, as well as helping in the fight against the tide of mechanised uniformity and homogenisation. More recently (2001), Samworth Brothers have acquired the Mrs Beeton's name under which they manufacture branded cakes and jams made by 'uncompromising baking' to 'traditional recipes'. As I detailed in the previous chapter, Mrs Beeton's cookery books and household management manuals are synonymous with middle-class Victorian British identity and the subsequent nostalgia associated with this era (Beeton, 1861; Freeman, 1977; Hardyment, 1995) As with D&M, both the Ginsters and Mrs Beeton's brands are bound up with historical and geographical constructions that are appropriated to serve a commercial agenda. British culinary heritage and nostalgia, I argue, is as much a business for Samworth Brothers as the pork pies, ready-meals and Cornish pasties they manufacture.

British culinary heritage, nostalgia and tradition are also the 'business' of Stephen Hallam. The son of a Leicestershire grocer, Hallam trained for two years at the National Bakery School, became a member of the Worshipful Company of Bakers at the age of 20, worked as an apprentice to a famous baker in Germany and then as the Head Patissier on Cunard Line cruises for three years. For all his professional life Hallam has been committed to learning the craft of baking. Hallam describes himself as a 'craftbaker' and talked lyrically and at length about the need to protect traditional baking skills and knowledges. As the Managing Director and public face of D&M Ye Old Pork Pie Shoppe, Hallam is frequently invited to appear on radio and television and is routinely quoted in press articles about D&M. On much of D&M's marketing material, Hallam is photographed wearing a traditional white bakers' overcoat, striped shirt, bow-tie & white hat while holding a platter of pork pies (see figure 5). Hallam is, therefore, positioned by himself, by his employers and by the public as a craft baker and the 'expert' protector of pork pie standards and traditions. At a public, professional and personal level Hallam is invested in authenticating narratives and practices.

---

10 [www.samworthbrothers.co.uk](http://www.samworthbrothers.co.uk)
Image from D&M promotional material depicting Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe in Melton Mowbray. The shop was rebuilt from in 1997 following a fire which destroyed the original building. Although few pork pies are baked on this premises the shop is central to the D&M brand and its association with heritage, 'traditional' Englishness and the past practices of the 'local' bakery and small market town.
Image of D&M pork pies depicting ‘old fashioned’ wax paper packaging and the ‘bowed’ and ‘uneven’ character of the pies. The manufactured irregularity of the pies paradoxically makes them appear ‘home-made’ or ‘handmade’ rather than produced as part of a highly mechanised and automated system.
Advert for Ginsters pies which appeared in 2001 issue of ‘Hello’ magazine. Ginsters, like D&M, is owned by Samworth Brothers. The advert emphasises an idealised association between ‘the rural’ and ‘people power’ to distinguish the brand from ‘ordinary’ mass produced Cornish pasties.
Figure 5  

Craft Baker Stephen Hallam

Photograph of Stephen Hallam taken from D&M promotional material. The Dressed in traditional bakers uniform Hallam embodied expertise endorses the authenticity of the D&M pies although, by his own admission, he has nothing to do with their production.
In my first meeting with Stephen Hallam it was clear that his role as Managing Director was, in part, to perform the authenticating narrative of the D&M pork pie. On arrival at his home he opened a plastic bag and placed a large pork pie, intended for our lunch, on a chopping board. While Hallam fetched plates and cutlery I asked him, off tape and casually, what determined a good pork pie. Hallam then abandoned preparing lunch and, using the pie on the board as a prop, explained the combination of ingredients, method and location that added up to create the ‘authentic’ Melton Mowbray pork pie. The explanation took about twenty minutes and was detailed, passionate and convincing.

Over the course of our meetings and 23 hours of recording, Hallam repeated this account of the Melton Mowbray pork pie three other times. My final visit to Melton, involved Hallam, of his own initiative, showing me how to make a handcrafted pork pie. Hallam had cleared time in his diary and the presentation area at ‘Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe’ so that I was able to record what was a 40minute demonstration and explanation.

These performances authenticating the pork pie bare little relation to the processes utilised to manufacture pork pies commercially but they simultaneously serve to legitimise Hallam as an expert and specialist, connect the D&M brand with this specialism and perpetuate the fiction of authenticity as knowable and beyond doubt. In this instance the demonstrations given to visitors to the D&M shop, the attempts to protect the legal status of the Melton Mowbray pork pie and Hallam’s unprompted willingness to perform an authenticating display for me and my tape recorder are examples of how authenticity, as Shun Lu and Gary Fine have argued, is ‘made real in cultural transactions’ (Lu & Fine, 1995: 535). Also, Hallam’s decision to perform the crafting of a pork pie suggests how these performances ‘make real’ not only the ‘authentic’ pork pie but also Hallam as a specialist. In other words, not only does Hallam as craft baker lend authenticity to the D&M brand by performing these authenticating narratives and practices but Hallam’s position as specialist is simultaneously performed, publicly displayed and ‘made real’ in daily practice.11

11Significantly, despite the fact that in staging the making of a ‘traditional’ pork pie Hallam was enacting a performance that, by his own description, was at odds with the realities of modern pork pie manufacture, he demonstrated no anxiety about this contradiction or, indeed, about my witnessing of this contradiction. Hallam negotiated the distance between his ‘authentic’ performance and his insider knowledge of modern pork pie production by establishing the larger Samworth Brothers’ division as the ‘other’ to the small scale, craft focused Dickinson & Morris ‘Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe’. In this configuration Hallam’s position became one in which he was able to champion old craft methods and by association values, while simultaneously knowing that he is working for a modern, mass-manufacturing company.
Thinking about authenticity as performance forces us to acknowledge how authenticity is a dynamically constructed and shaped process that can be mobilised, adopted and adapted at different scales by different actors and for different agendas. As with the narratives of multiculturalism and domesticity explored in previous chapters, narratives of authenticity can be mobilised with different degrees of self-consciousness. Understanding these various narratives through notions of performance that take place with varying degrees of reflexivity does not suggest that some performances are more or less ‘real’ than others. Instead, the notion of performance undertaken here and in other chapters emphasises the ways that identity discourses are naturalised and legitimised through various different narratives which, on close examination, are shown to be contingent, contextual, contested and constructed. Having understood authenticity as a dynamic performance, relying upon the demonstration of craft skills, of local knowledges and traditional manufacturing practices, the appeal of authenticity needs examining. What function, for Hallam and for D&M do authenticating narratives and performances serve? I argue that Hallam’s discomfort with mass manufacture and automation, expressed in relation to his desire for autonomy, pleasure and external validation, is mediated through his performance of authenticity. In understanding the appeal for Hallam in maintaining and preserving craft skills we can understand the wider appeal of authentication and how it mediates discomfort raised by mass manufacture.

6.4 Authenticity, Mass Manufacture and Commodification

Producing thousands of pork pies every week does not sit easily with the nostalgic rhetoric of authenticity, one that implicitly or explicitly celebrates craft skills rather than mechanisation, tradition rather than progress, the past rather than the present and the rural rather than the urban. In other words, narratives of ‘authenticity’ in the food industry have at best tenuous relationships with ‘authentic’ practices, places or pasts. As Cook et al. have noted, authentication must always be at odds with the realities of modern food consumption (and production):

What both these regions and more ‘global locals’ share is an antithesis to the logic of contemporary living and consumption in which contamination, in a multitude of guises, proliferates. Of course, as with all such constructions of authenticity, this poses the awkward paradox of how to rationalise the potential contamination of these pure, local traditions as they are ‘incorporated’ into
wider culinary circuits (indeed as they are actually produced though engagements within those wider circuits). (Cook et al 1999: 235)

Although I agree that narratives of authenticity pose an 'awkward paradox', I believe that this explanation fails to account for the degree of agency, anxiety and politics at play in the commercial and personal appropriation of authenticity. This section argues that the impetus to mobilise authenticating narratives can be understood at different but related scales: first, these narratives are commercially motivated by the desire to protect products from over-commodification and to ensure their market value; and second, the appeal of these narratives relate to fears, expressed by Hallam, that mass manufacturing threatens creativity, professionalism and, ultimately, autonomy.

That mass manufacture is conjured up as the enemy in current debates about the British food industry is illustrated by a number of press articles lamenting the loss of British culinary heritage. In this configuration the duped consumer, the uncompetitive small-producer and British regional foods are envisaged as under threat from the exploitative and homogenising effects of modern manufacture and retail practices. In her article titled 'A Bit of Local Flavour Please', for example, Caroline Stacey notes, 'It's too late for some foods. Recipes have been lost, killed off by mass production; other specialities have suffered a natural evolutionary fate' (Stacey, 2002:17). Mass manufacture is posited as neither 'natural' nor 'evolutionary' but murderous. The point here is not to argue either for or against mass manufacture but to recognise the prevalence of anxieties raised by mass manufacture and to consider the relation between these and authenticating narratives. A primary function of authentication, I argue, is to protect products from the devaluation and contamination threatened by overt commodification and mass production even though (and because) narratives and practices of authentication are at odds with the everyday processes of manufacture, distribution and mainstream retailing. Hallam's discomfort with mechanisation is made clear in the following extract when he makes a distinction between a commodity produced through mass production and an object produced by a craftsman:

Polly: What effect does being a craftsman have on the product itself?
Hallam: Well you lose touch with it, it just becomes another commodity, the product's got to have some passion in it. I can talk about baking but if you have some skills you will treat that object with some respect and that has to be transferred on the selling side and eventually to the customer and the customer
will eventually get to know something that is made with passion and something that hasn’t.12

The comparison between mass-produced products, ‘just another commodity,’ and crafted ‘objects,’ made with ‘respect’ and ‘passion,’ demonstrates how commodification is negatively configured in opposition to ‘authenticity’ by Hallam. The anxiety underlying this extract pertains to the loss of individual control of production processes and products and is articulated in relation to lost ‘skills’, ‘respect’ and ‘passion.’ Igor Kopytoff explains the cultural resistance to commodification in the following way:

The counterdrive to this potential onrush of commoditization is culture. In the sense that commoditization homogenizes value, while the essence of culture is discrimination, excessive commoditization is anti-cultural – as indeed so many have perceived it or sensed it to be. (Kopytoff, 1986: 73)

Kopytoff suggests that stereotypically commodification is associated with debasement and loss of value. For D&M products, discrimination and distinction within a market place is made possible through the adoption of authenticity. The authenticating narratives associated with D&M products place those products in an imagined geographical historical context – they are culturally located and therefore not like ‘ordinary,’ mass produced commodities. The commercial practices of D&M are, therefore, constituted through and by cultural discourses, a recognition that brings into question stereotypical divisions between the commercial and cultural. (Jackson, 2002).

Moreover, Hallam’s extract suggests that mechanisation and commodification involves a distance, a ‘losing touch’ between product, producer and consumer. It is clear, therefore, that authenticating narratives are mobilised to mediate this distance, ensuring that customers, producers and products are connected to and invested in a unified, cohesive and inclusive narrative. As Hallam states:

Hallam: If we went shooting our mouths off saying every single pie is hand-raised, it’s not. Nowadays every single pie is raised in a machine in a hoop but we take the hoop off before we bake the pies so we’ve developed a system to help us bake lots and lots of pies.13

Hallam makes clear that authenticity is a construction with boundaries – there is not one version of authenticity, there are many, mobilised for different ends. The baking of pies

12 Interview with Steven Hallam (Melton Mowbray), born Leicestershire 1956, craft baker, recorded by Polly Russell 23.3.01 Tape 11 Side B C821/50/11
13 Interview with Stephen Hallam (2001) Tape 6 Side A, C821/50/11
without hoops, for example, is used to simultaneously legitimise and classify the authenticity of Melton Mowbray pork pies. And yet this production practice is only one element of a process that takes place in a modern factory and relies on dicing, depositing and pastry machines, travelling ovens and chillers and automated packing lines. The particular 'authentic' practice preserved by Dickinson & Morris is the very practice that produces an old-fashioned, hand-crafted aesthetic – a bowed and slightly uneven pastry case. Authenticity, selected, constructed and performed is therefore produced by a highly mechanised system and simultaneously hides that system.

Referring to Kopytoff's description of sacred objects as ones that are 'singularised' or removed from a commodity sphere, Appadurai argues that it is possible for commodities to 'involve the more or less permanent commoditizing of singularities' (1986: 17). The recognition that commodities can be both simultaneously 'singularised' and commodified – that their value as a commodity can depend on their singularisation - is useful in understanding how the appropriation of authentication functions for D&M products and for Hallam as an employee. The product of a mechanised and automated set of practices, the D&M pork pie is singularised via authenticating narratives and is, therefore the 'perfect' commodity – made highly commercial through a combination of the practices of mass manufacture and the narrative of authenticity. As I have discussed in previous chapters, Appadurai argues that at some point in their life cycle commodities may be 'enclaved' (removed from a commodified zone to one that is confined) and 'diverted' (moved from a confined zone into a profitable one). With the D&M brand, enclaving and diversion occur simultaneously. In other words, the value of D&M pork pies derives precisely from their association with those narratives and practices that are positioned and imagined by Hallam as being 'outside' commodification – heritage, passion and 'hands on', small scale production. Authenticating narratives protect D&M pork pie products from the ill effects of commodification, distinguishing them from 'mere' commodities while also improving and ensuring the product's commodity value in the market place. The D&M pork pie, therefore, is simultaneously enclaved and diverted and it is this dual process that ensures the successful and mediated commodification of the brand.

If at a commercial level authenticating narratives mediate the anxieties raised by commodification and ensure the market value of D&M pork pies via a process of
enclaving and diverting, for Hallam they also mediate his professional anxieties about
deskilling and autonomy in the work place. These anxieties are not only imagined but
experienced as part of his working life. There is a tension between Hallam's personal
and professional investment in craft skills and the degree to which his knowledges are
utilised by Samworth Brothers. As Hallam states, although he was employed precisely
because of his knowledge and experience his specialist advice is seldom called upon by
the larger Samworth Brothers' organisation:

*Polly: Do they ever ask you to advise them?*
Hallam: No. I have a skill that could be put to good use there... That was
recognised by David Samworth in 1992 when I was employed but...
*Polly: Going back to that original question about how often they use you and
your skill.*
Hallam: Never. They have their own technical people in each division and they
are technical competent to the food they produce....

There is a tension, therefore, between the lived practice of authenticity (Hallam's craft
skills) and the realities of manufacture (producing thousands of pork pies each day).
Performance and practice are not equally experienced – in lending the brand authenticity
Hallam may be central to the authenticating performances of the brand but his craft-
skills have no place in the highly commercial practices of mass manufacture. Asked to
explain whether his thoughts about the relationship between his craft skills and the
technology used to produce D&M pork pies Hallam responded in the following way:

*Polly: Do you think that the best craftsman can ever be replicated by technology*
Hallam: Well those in manufacturing would say they can but I don't think so.
*Polly: How skill based are the lines at the factory?*
Hallam: Team leaders are skilled.
*Polly: Are they bakers?*
Hallam: Some of them, yes. But where someone like me can lose face is it can
over-face you when you go into some of these large bakeries and are they
bakeries or are they large efficiency production lines and you can lose track of
the enjoyment of working with the raw ingredients to end up with whatever
you're making. There, you know, you're...
*Polly: How do you feel about that?*
Hallam: Well I could never work over at Charnwood (another Samworth
Brothers' factory), it's churning the product out, it's efficiency. I'm too, em, I

---

14 Interview with Stephen Hallam (2001) Tape 12 Side A, C821/50/12
need to be in touch with the real world... I couldn’t cope with that, you’re closed in, you’ve got no freedom in the field that you’re working with.

Polly: Would it bother you because of the environment or the products?

Hallam: Well the environment definitely and the product. Churn them out and that’s not for me.  

Hallam equates working in a factory here with being ‘closed in’, with limiting his ‘freedom’ and the threat of being ‘overfaced’, swamped. By contrast, working as a craftsperson is, for Hallam, bound up with ‘enjoyment’, being ‘in touch with the real world’ and, caring for products as opposed to ‘churning them out.’ As he stated on another occasion, ‘passion for me is something that’s associated with craft skills.’ For Hallam, efficiency and technology are at odds with the pleasure, pride and freedom he derives from his work as a craftsperson. This extract illustrates how Hallam experiences the threat of mass production in terms of his own potential professional eradication. In this context his relationship to authenticating narratives is made all the more paradoxical – Hallam, as professional baker is essential to the perpetuation of the brand, yet in practice is irrelevant to the production of the product.

In the following extract, Hallam articulates the degree of mechanisation and human involvement utilised to manufacture D&M pork pies:

Polly: But when you look at your D&M pork pies that are being produced in the factory not the shop, where’s the compromise?

Hallam: You can’t tell that actually. But they’re not totally because they are mass-produced but they’re also hand finished because the crimping, which we insisted on is done by hands. The pastry case is raised with a machine, the meat is deposited with a machine, the lid is placed with a machine, the lid is then initially secured, so a stamp comes down to make sure it is well and truly attached to the pie, then it’s a pair of hands that puts a crimp on the top, it’s a pair of hand that puts the hole in the top, it’s a hand that puts the glaze on the top although you could use a machine for that. The jelly is done by machine which is better or you might get human error and miss one. Yes it’s a compromise but I don’t think you’ll ever get a machine that does it all, that doesn’t work for me. Is that controversial? You can’t substitute that technical knowledge, that knowledge with the hands, the eyes, the nose. You will smell a pie baking and your nose will tell you if something is wrong. Now you tell me a machine that can do that.

Polly: I suppose I’m trying to understand how that purist philosophy about being a craftsman is compatible with the economic reality of being part of Samworth

15 Interview with Stephen Hallam (2001) Tape 12 Side A, C821/50/12
16 Interview with Stephen Hallam (2001) Tape 6 Side A, C821/50/06
17 Hallam’s investment in craftskills does not prevent him conceding that mass manufactured products can be better than crafted ones – more consistent, less chance of human error.
Brothers and with pork pies that are partly hand crafted but are also mass produced

Hallam: Commercialism creeps in. The pork pie shop is at the heart of the Dickinson and Morris brand. There’s a lot of marketing that goes on. Would the pork pie shop be there if it wasn’t for Samworth Brothers is a good scenario I suppose? [...] Now the D&M pie has never been sold as a hand raised pie. You see you have the heritage where a hundred and eighty years ago it was made by hand because there was no other thing than hands, no machine to do it. As long as you still embody the essence of the heritage there’s nothing amiss to using technology to assist you with that. Where it would be criminally wrong, to my point of view if you left all the heritage behind and totally lost the hands on approach, em because it still needs overseeing, it still needs control and you still need skilled people to control that and someone who’s never sort of baked before and has no baking skills you can’t expect them to run a line or tell if a product is right or wrong.18

From this extract the role of ‘heritage’ or authenticating narratives for Hallam is made clear. While Hallam understands the need and even acknowledges the advantages of mechanisation, he also draws repeated attention to the elements of the production process where ‘hands’ and ‘humans’ are used. When pushed, Hallam acknowledges that the process is ‘a compromise’, neither wholly ‘authentic’ nor wholly ‘mechanised’ – the products are both ‘mass-produced’ and ‘hand finished’ and ‘heritage’ is conjured up to explain and mediate this tension. Hallam states that ‘heritage’ must be protected because ‘you need skilled people.’ In fact, what his explanation suggests is quite the opposite. Skilled people can be replaced by machines and this constantly threatens to render Hallam disposable. Hallam is highly and personally invested in ‘heritage’, or authenticating narratives, because they legitimise, centralise and validate his education and his training but, most crucially, his position as Managing Director of D&M Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe. Significantly Hallam’s role is performed at the end of a long and highly mechanised process – Hallam becomes necessary at the point of customer interface. The threat of mass manufacture, therefore, is mediated and avoided both personally for Hallam and commercially for the D&M brand via the performances of authenticating narratives, even when these performances do not relate or replicate the actual procedures of production.

6.5 Authenticity, Place & Identity

As others have noted, narratives of multiculturalism that dominate the food industry are inextricably bound up with narratives of authenticity (Cook et al, 1996; May 1994;

18 Interview with Stephen Hallam (2001) Tape 11 Side B, C821/50/11
James, 1996). In part authenticating narratives, deployed in the food industry are a way that the ethnicity of Britishness and Englishness are produced, narrated and imagined (Bell & Valentine 1997: 169-171). Attempts to celebrate and promote ‘traditional’ and ‘regional’ British food products and to market and protect foods designated as British, for instance, are ways that the ethnicity of Britishness and Englishness is produced as a discursive practice and one that has significant commercial and cultural implications (Ilbery & Kneafsy 2000; Ray, 1998).

Hallam’s life story and the authenticating narratives invoked to promote the D&M brand reveal considerable discomfort about modern food production and its impact (imagined/actual/potential) on place and identity. This discomfort is expressed at a number of different scales from the family through to the nation. Asked his feelings about the ready meals produced by other Samworth Brothers companies, Hallam explained how, ‘from a family values point of view I think it’s sad.’ Hallam’s association between ready meals produced in a large, automated factory and the loss of family values are a reminder of how food practices play a key role in structuring how the family and home is experienced and imagined (DeVault, 1991). Authenticating narratives almost invariably invoke populism and nostalgia to conjure up imagined pasts and places. The prevalence of an idyllic countryside and small rural communities as central to these narratives speak more of contemporary fears about place and identity than they do about the lived identities, practices and places of the past (Little, 1999).

The relation between narratives of domesticity and those of authenticity is important to acknowledge. While stereotypical narratives of domesticity ‘naturally’ locate women in relation to the ‘home’ and family, the ‘traditional’ home and family, and their relation to the community, region and nation are central to authenticating narratives. Moreover, narratives of multiculturalism may be said, in some contexts, to have an inverse relation to those of domesticity and authenticity in that they are ways that contemporary, urban and multicultural, as opposed to historical, rural and homogenous, Britain is discursively produced and imagined.

19 Interview with Stephen Hallam (2001) 4 side A, C821/50/04
20 Valentine’s research on lesbian rural communities in the US is helpful in unpacking notions of the rural. In particular Valentine notes that while lesbian communities perceived the rural as a place through which to escape the ‘man-made’ city, they drew upon nostalgic and stereotyped images of the rural, while also imagining the rural in a very different way to white, middle class men. Valentine’s work indicates that the rural has not only been idealised by the white and middle class majority and also how idealised notions of the rural are contingent and contested (Valentine, 1997).
The authenticating narratives associated with the D&M pork pie mask the conditions of contemporary production (mass manufacture with an emphasis on high volumes and large distribution) and historical production (the pork pie as the product of specific class relations, industrialisation and the divide between town and country).\(^{21}\) In part, authenticating narratives fetishise the inequalities of power relations that made the 'traditional countryside' possible (Williams, 1973). As Lowenthal reminds us, '(t)he past thus conjured up is, to be sure, largely an artefact of the present' (Lowenthal, 1985: xvi). In recognising how discourses of authenticity fabricate a version of the past, we must also recognize how narratives of authenticity fabricate versions of the present. As Lowenthal states: 'However faithfully we preserve, however authentically we restore, however deeply we immerse ourselves in bygone times, life back then was based on ways of being and believing incommensurable with our own. (Lowenthal, 1985: xvi) The authenticating narratives of the D&M brand mask the mechanised and highly commercial, commoditized process of food manufacture and the social relations that make these processes possible. The D&M brand appeals to the consumer via an association with heritage and tradition which is culturally specific and politically loaded. As Agyemen and Spooner have argued, '[t]he idea of national culture and its connection with the countryside, as employed by the extreme right, also works on a more popular level. A sense of ownership and belonging to the countryside, and the nation itself, is often constructed through an appeal to heritage.' (Agyemen & Spooner, 2000: 201) I argue that the authenticating narratives of D&M pork pies are productive of a certain sort of Britishness, discourses that implicitly mobilise reactionary imaginings of the countryside, of white British ethnicity and of heritage in the face of post-modernity, mass production, urbanisation and shifting national identity.

---

\(^{21}\) Pork pies were created as a by-product of the Stilton cheese making process and the fox hunting culture of the Leicestershire area in the early-nineteenth century. Stilton cheese production resulted in a surplus of whey, an ideal food for pigs. As a result pork production in the Leicestershire area grew rapidly. During the hunting season pork pies, small enough to fit in the pocket of a hunting jacket, were given to the hunt as a snack. At the end of the hunting season wealthy Londoners returned to the city, taking with them a taste for the pork pie. In 1840 a baker in Melton started distributing pork pies via the London-Leeds stagecoach. The growth of the railways during the mid-nineteenth century allowed for increased distribution of pork pies to London and other cities and resulted in the growth of wholesale pork pie manufacturers. In effect the popularity of the pork pie is bound up with the specific power relations and economics of class, town and country and industrialisation in nineteenth century Britain (Hickman, 1997).
The authenticating narratives associated with the D&M pork pie mask the conditions of contemporary production (mass manufacture with an emphasis on high volumes and large distribution) and historical production (the pork pie as the product of specific class relations, industrialisation and the divide between town and country).\textsuperscript{21} In part, authenticating narratives fetishise the inequalities of power relations that made the ‘traditional countryside’ possible (Williams, 1973). As Lowenthal reminds us, ‘(t)he past thus conjured up is, to be sure, largely an artefact of the present’ (Lowenthal, 1985: xvi). In recognising how narratives of authenticity fabricate a version of the past, we must also recognise how they fabricate versions of the present. As Lowenthal states: ‘However faithfully we preserve, however authentically we restore, however deeply we immerse ourselves in bygone times, life back then was based on ways of being and believing incommensurable with our own. (Lowenthal, 1985: xvi) The authenticating narratives of the D&M brand mask the mechanised and highly commercial, commoditised process of food manufacture and the social relations that make these processes possible. The D&M brand appeals to the consumer via an association with heritage and tradition which is culturally specific and politically loaded. As Agyemen and Spooner have argued, ‘[t]he idea of national culture and its connection with the countryside, as employed by the extreme right, also works on a more popular level. A sense of ownership and belonging to the countryside, and the nation itself, is often constructed through an appeal to heritage.’ (Agyemen & Spooner, 2000: 201) I argue that the authenticating narratives of D&M pork pies are productive of a certain sort of Britishness, narratives that implicitly mobilise reactionary imaginings of the countryside, of white British ethnicity and of heritage in the face of post-modernity, mass production, urbanisation and shifting national identity.

\textsuperscript{21} Pork pies were created as a by-product of the Stilton cheese making process and the fox hunting culture of the Leicestershire area in the early-nineteenth century. Stilton cheese production resulted in a surplus of whey, an ideal food for pigs. As a result pork production in the Leicestershire area grew rapidly. During the hunting season pork pies, small enough to fit in the pocket of a hunting jacket, were given to the hunt as a snack. At the end of the hunting season wealthy Londoners returned to the city, taking with them a taste for the pork pie. In 1840 a baker in Melton started distributing pork pies via the London-Leeds stagecoach. The growth of the railways during the mid-nineteenth century allowed for increased distribution of pork pies to London and other cities and resulted in the growth of wholesale pork pie manufacturers. In effect the popularity of the pork pie is bound up with the specific power relations and economics of class, town and country and industrialisation in nineteenth century Britain (Hickman, 1997).
Hallam positions the D&M shop as the cultural counterpoint to the uniformity, anonymity and enormity of other Samworth Brothers' divisions. Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe is a place where 'everybody cares right down to the person who sweeps the floor' whereas, for example, 'at Charnwood it's churning the product out, it's efficiency. I'm too, em, I need to be in touch with the real world...I couldn't cope with that, you're closed in, you've got no freedom in the field that you're working with.' Hallam here articulates the appeal of traditional practices and products of the shop - the intimate working conditions, the carefully crafted food, the close relationship between staff and customers and the relative autonomy from Samworth Brothers' company directives. This appeal indicates, in part, a longing for the imagined places and practices of the past - the local shop of yesteryear and the relationships that went with it. In Hallam's life story the authenticating narratives associated with the D&M pork pie position the local shop, the community, the home and the family in opposition to and under threat from a contemporary backdrop of post-modern life of which mass manufacture and ready meals are, for Hallam, symptomatic.

The nostalgia articulated by Hallam in his descriptions of the workplace suggests why the D&M shop plays such a significant part in the authenticating narratives of the pork pie brand. The connection between the D&M brand and the shop in Melton Mowbray is emphasised on the brand packaging, marketing material, the pork pie web site and in histories of the pork pie commissioned by Samworth Brothers (Beaver, 1997; Hickman, 1997). The 'shoppe' is positioned, through packaging, marketing and the media, as the place where D&M pies are produced and this association validates the pies as 'traditional' and 'authentic.' The D&M brand, however, is sold throughout the country via mail order and through mainstream and specialist retail outlets from Tesco to Fortnum & Masons. Producing pies in the volumes required to service these retail outlets would be logistically impossible in the small space of the D&M shop. Instead, D&M pies are made at a factory which is located about 20 miles from Melton, employs

---

22 Interview with Stephen Hallam (2001) Tape 11 Side B, C821/50/11
23 www.porkpie.co.uk
24 The shop is a two-storey, double-fronted premises. The back of the shop contains a small bakery with ovens, racks and baking equipment. This area is approximately 20 foot by 15 foot and is separated from the shop by a counter selling hot food for takeaway purchases. In one corner there is a small demonstration area and to the right of this, immediately right of the shop entrance is a counter serving baked products and pork pies. One half of the shop is dedicated to displaying the history of the Melton Mowbray pork pies and press articles written about D&M. Upstairs there is another smaller work room where products are decorated, a store room and offices for secretaries and Steven Hallam.
380 people and produces own label pork pies for Britain’s top multiples as well as the D&M brand. When talking about the significance of the bakery in Melton Mowbray, Hallam acknowledged a distance between customer perception and the actual function of the shop:

Hallam: The retail part is an inherent part of the brand because the brand is nothing without the Olde Pork Pie Shoppe and now the sausage shop in the heart of Melton Mowbray. To a lot of consumers, a lot of people, D&M is just the pork shop and they believe all these packets of pork pie and sausages you see in supermarkets on shelves come from the shop but in reality they can’t, we don’t have the space, it’s impossible. So we utilise the resources of our sister companies and divisions in the group who specialise in pork pies and sausages. And for the branded products, ie all those that are in supermarkets come from the pork pie bakery facility just on the outskirts of Leicester, that’s Walker’s of Leicester.25

The literal and metaphorical distance between the imagined place of production and actual place of production of D&M pork pies is substantial and significant. Massey’s description of the role of the past in constructing experiences of the present is helpful here. As she argues:

This does not mean that the past is irrelevant to the identity of place. It simply means that there is no internally produced, essential place. The identity of place, just as Hall argues in relation to cultural identity, is always and continuously being produced. Instead of looking back with nostalgia to some identity of place which it is assumed already exists, the past has to be constructed. (Massey, 1992: 14)

In this instance, the D&M shop situated in the small market town of Melton Mowbray serves as the place to stage the performance of the brand. What is significant is that although Hallam recognises and articulates the distance between discourse and practice in the production of pork pies, he is clearly invested in perpetuating and prolonging this performance and production. As Managing Director Hallam, a life-long professional baker, validates, constructs and authenticates the place and performance of the bakery, despite the fact that most products sold on the premises are sourced from outside manufacturers. The shop functions not so much as a place where pork pies are made but where a safe, secure and nostalgic version of food production and Britishness is made and where Hallam’s identity – as British craft baker - is performed and produced.

25 Interview with Stephen Hallam (2001) Tape 4 Side A, C821/50/04
The connection between the pork pie and Britishness is alluded to in marketing material, press articles and the attempts to protect the Melton Mowbray name from ‘outside’ production. The promotional phrase appearing on D&M marketing material, ‘Born and Raised in Melton Mowbray’, ostensibly alludes to the geographical relation of the pork pie to Melton and the historical production technique of hand raising the pie case. But in its celebration of geographical origins and their relation to identity, the phrase is reminiscent of nationalist rhetoric inviting those not born ‘here’ to ‘go back home.’(Gilroy, 1987). The link between Britishness and pork pies is made explicit in various articles celebrating traditional British food products. In a feature for the family-focused Candis magazine titled ‘Protect our Pork Pies’ the subheading states: ‘As British as roast beef, the humble pork pie is under threat – but the people of Melton Mowbray are ready to fight’ (Arnot, 2001: 52). Implicitly this title and subheading connect threatened British products with threatened British identity and as such the language used is reminiscent of recent nationalist rhetoric mobilised by the right in relation to immigration in Britain (Gilroy, 1987). Later in the article Councillor O’Callaghan, the Chairman of the Melton Mowbray Pork Pie Association is quoted as saying: ‘That’s why we need protection from Brussels. It’s our heritage, our name, and we don’t like outsiders using it.’ Hallam similarly connects the protecting of the pork pie with protecting Britishness. Asked to explain the need to gain legal recognition for the status of the Melton Mowbray pork pie Hallam states:

Hallam: I think Gary Rhodes was particularly good at this and said what dish is there more classic to Britain than the pork pie? The pork pie would be universally recognised through the land and it needs protecting. In this fast living world spending more time at work and trying to take short cuts and it’s happening to the foods as well, well my idea about ready meals as well, and the pork pie is to Britain as the sun is to a sunny day and it’s part and parcel of it. And the business has not been good at protecting the pork pie and that is the fault of business...

There are two elements from this that I want to extract – the first relates to how producing a pork pie, specifically a Melton Mowbray pork pie, is about protecting and performing Britishness and the second is how this is set against the imagined threats of the ‘fast living world’ and ‘outsiders.’ The Britishness alluded to here is clearly a

---

26 For an account of the relation between specific foods, particularly beef, and British national identity see Bishop, 1991.
27 Interview with Stephen Hallam (2001) Tape 5 Side B, C821/50/05
specific sort of Britishness – not a Britishness that celebrates social change, technological change or, by implication, the changes brought by contemporary multiculturalism discussed in chapter 4. When Hallam claims that the pork pie is ‘universally recognised through the land’ the perimeters of this vision exclude, presumably, the Asian population ‘down the road’ in the ‘heart of Leicester.’ That the pork pie is British is, according to Hallam, as natural as the sun in the sky. Hallam’s connection between the naturalness of the sun and the Britishness of the pork pie is important because it suggests how narratives of authenticity about ‘traditional British’ foods construct an inevitable, natural, historically and geographically knowable Britishness (Jackson & Penrose, 1993).

Moreover, I argue that Hallam’s descriptions of the shop and the centrality of the shop in the authenticating narratives of the D&M brand construct not only an ideal of place and past practices but of identity too. In the following extract the description of the work culture in a Samworth Brothers factory in the ‘heart of Leicester’28 where there are ‘a lot of Muslims’ and ‘a lot of Hindus’ is contrasted with the work culture of D&M:

Hallam: Bradgate is in the heart of Leicester, it’s very multi racial so you have a lot of Muslims, you have a lot of Hindus, I presume but I don’t know the details but that in itself creates a different viewpoint. Take last Christmas when Bradgate gave their employees some gifts. Hunt cake, pork pie well you can’t be giving a Muslim a pork pie, it’s got pork in it. Or a Hindu a Hunt cake, it’s got alcohol in it. So you see this is all part of understanding the culture of those who work for you. But at Dickinson and Morris it’s a very different culture there. It has the best cultural survey within the group, it’s very tight, very close, very friendly, very committed, there aren’t hangers on there. There is a team of 27 and you can’t afford to have people who don’t fit in or one person’s opinion is 4% of an overall percentage of feeling or response. So while that can be good it can also be a threat... (recording interrupted by telephone, tape paused then continued). So yes although our culture is a very close one and friendly one it can be a threat to a new person joining the team....because they’ve got to fit in with the other team members....you’ve got to be a team player to fit in with the team you see and that takes, um, there’s a skill involved with that......It is much more than a job. They enjoy coming to work and if they didn’t there wouldn’t be that lovely rapport between the shop ladies and the customers.
Polly: Is there any sense that the employees of Dickinson & Morris shop should change in accordance with the local area which you said had lots of Hindus and Muslims?
Hallam: Well no, that’s Bradgate you see because of where Bradgate is in Leicester and Leicester has the largest Asian community in the country so it’s only understandable that a large majority of the employees are....but no, not in

---

28 Interview with Stephen Hallam (2001) Tape 9 Side A, C821/50/05
Melton. We seem to have naturally found a mix of ladies working in the shop. Now we're not discriminatory in any way. Colour, race or sex or what have you. But I don't remember in nine years ever receiving a job application for a shop assistant for a man.29

This extract illustrates how 'traditionally' British food is bound up with normalising the ethnicity of Britishness—the Muslims and Hindus cannot consume pork pie or hunt cake, those 'natural' British products, and are excluded, therefore, from the 'normal' rituals of Britishness, in this instance Christmas. Even though Hallam acknowledges that the work force at Bradgate is largely not white or Christian, Britishness remains the dominant, defining culture. Agyeman and Spooner suggest that this process is characteristic of the ways that notions of ethnicity and rurality are constituted:

The invisibility of the dominant Self has worked through differential relations of power, allowing whiteness to remain outside the process of definition. The ethnic Other has been constantly redefined and renamed, reinforcing its difference and marginality from a white 'norm'. (2000: 199)

That 'ethnic' people do not consume 'traditional' British foods, therefore, is put under scrutiny as the thing to be examined and is what marks 'them' out as non-British. The practices of Britishness or Britishness per se - Christmas, Hunt cake and Pork pie here- are the norm against which everything else is compared. Authenticating narratives surrounding the pork pie not only, therefore, produce and normalise a certain sort of Britishness but also hide the social relations ('ethnic population, urban population working in factories') that produce those 'authentically British' products. Authenticating narratives are bound up, therefore, with the real politics of exclusion not only the politics of identity.

Second, the extract reminds us of the divide between city and country in terms of identity. The city here is the 'place' where 'ethnic' people are located. Moreover these people work in the factory, the space associated by Hallam as being 'impersonal', 'closed in' and 'lacking freedom.' ‘Ethnic’ people are thus negatively associated with the city (they live there) and with mass production (they work there). The configuration between the city, country and race has been described by Agyemen and Spooner in the following way: 'In the white imagination people of colour are confined to towns and cities, representing an urban, 'alien' environment, and the white landscape of rurality is

29 Interview with Stephen Hallam (2001) Tape 9 Side A, C821/50/09
aligned with 'nativeness' and the absence of evil or danger' (2000: 199). The negativity of these 'ethnic'/city/factory associations is made clear in Hallam’s slide from describing the 'culture' of Bradgate with its 'different view-point', to the culture of the D&M shop. Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe has, according to Hallam, 'the best cultural survey' in the Samworth group, 'it is close', like 'family' and 'there aren't hangers on there.' Implicitly the Muslims and Hindus of Bradgate with their 'different view point' would not 'fit in' at the shop in Melton Mowbray or, indeed in Melton, a small market town. Hallam’s description illustrates how the authenticating narratives of the D&M brand, performed at the shop in Melton Mowbray invoke the countryside and the market town as the rightful and natural place of white Britishness. For Hallam, it is 'natural' that Asians should work in the factory at Bradgate and that the shop in Melton should have a ‘natural’ mix of white ‘ladies’ because these social structures are legitimised and normalised through daily practice. The authenticating narratives and practices of the D&M pork pie put on show Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe, Melton Mowbray, the pork pie heritage, a white craft-baker and white female shop assistants while behind the scenes a large factory in Leicester staffed by Muslims and Hindus connected to a national distribution system and a large scale corporation produce the D&M pork pie products. The city, therefore, remains associated with mass production, ethnic diversity and threatened family life while the countryside is associated with local production (the shop, the baker), the community (Melton Mowbray, the craft baker and the customer/staff relationship) and white Britishness (employees, 'born and raised' and heritage).

6.6 Authenticity, Cultural Capital
Focussing on D&M and Henrietta Green this section explores authenticating narratives and practices in relation to the politics of cultural capital. Drawing from Bourdieu’s work analysing taste as a culturally and economically determined and determining practice, this section argues how food producers’ investments in authenticating narratives are a means through which cultural capital – producers’ and consumers’ - can be acquired and accumulated. This section argues that a significant function of authenticating narratives is to appeal to consumers with economic and cultural capital. Further, authenticating narratives are understood here to be representative of and productive of cultural and economic capital. Authenticating narratives are evidence of food’s relation to class and status as an everyday process. Although ostensibly food
producers mobilise narratives of authenticity with the aim to inform consumers of food origins and production methods, these are also ‘susceptible to co-optation in strategies of social distinction’ (Cook et al., 1996). Authenticating narratives draw from and cite specialised knowledges and as such can be mobilised by discerning consumers as an everyday display of cultural capital. As David Bell explains, cultural capital refers to the ways that ‘knowledge about taste, fashion, trends and so on’ (2002: 14) serve as a means of establishing social positions. Bourdieu argues that a function of culture is to obscure and add its legitimacy to power relations; I argue that authenticating narratives, that create a nostalgic version of the past and legitimise producer/consumer ‘taste’ in relation to claims to knowledge and history, obscure and legitimise economic and cultural inequalities. This section initially, therefore, uses Bourdieu’s work to establish the relation between narratives of authenticity and cultural capital and analyses the politics underlying this relation.

Towards the end of this section I suggest that Bourdieu’s account of taste in relation to necessity and choice cannot wholly account for the appeal of authenticating narratives in relation to food. I argue that the prevalence and appropriation of authenticating narratives in the contemporary British food industry should be understood to mediate fears about food safety. Narratives of authenticity mediate anxieties about modern food production that are both symbolic and material. In popular accounts, modern food production is configured as a threat to ‘traditional’ values and practices associated with the home, the countryside and the nation. In material terms, modern food production has been held responsible for a series of recent health scares such as BSE and Foot and Mouth disease, and as such is associated with danger. Authenticating narratives disassociate commercial food products from mass production by suggesting that foods are made of ‘traditional’ ingredients, to ‘authentic’ recipes and with ‘homemade’ methods. Authenticating narratives are thus mobilised to engender trust in food practices and products at a time of high anxiety about food. This reading of authenticating narratives therefore complicates Bourdieu’s distinction between necessity and choice as primarily economic by recognising the necessity of safety and health. I argue that if culinary culture in Britain is understood as ‘two-tier’ – differentiated by those with economic and cultural wealth and those without - that the relation between cultural capital, the necessity of food safety and authenticating narratives can be traced.
The connection between cultural capital and authenticating narratives in the food industry is made explicit when Henrietta Green describes the importance of protecting local practices and products. As I have noted previously, Green, the author of the *Food Lover’s Guides* series and originator and organiser of ‘Food Lover’s Fairs,’ is a champion of small producers and regional British food traditions. Green’s investment in authenticating narratives should be understood as partly commercial (her work), partly crusading (promoting ‘better’ food) and partly in relation to cultural capital (her tastes as related to her status and the performance and perpetuation of these). Green’s cultural knowledge, her ‘taste’ - is her capital, is how she makes money. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital - taste, knowledge, manners and patterns of consumption - combine to maintain social distinction. Prerequisites of cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, are knowledge, education and the freedom from economic necessity. In combination these determine and naturalise matters of ‘taste’ and ‘aesthetic’ judgement. In claiming expertise and knowledge, authenticating narratives are always bound up with the appropriation, display and production of cultural capital. Because narratives of authenticity inevitably involve claims to specialised knowledge and expertise they are mobilised by and appeal to those with cultural capital. To claim knowledge or expertise is about a delineation of power and social position and is, therefore, always political. In other words, for a product, practice, person or place to be positioned as ‘authentic,’ an interested party must necessarily determine the boundaries of and claim specialised knowledge. This expertise not only situates the ‘authentic’ but simultaneously situates the expert and this was made clear by Green during a discussion about her commitment to protecting ‘local distinctiveness.’ Green made an analogy between her experiences as a tourist in Tunisia and her beliefs about food. Green described visiting a remote village and purchasing a basket that was distinct from those available in tourist areas - this basket, for Green, was the ‘authentic’ Tunisian basket and much better than the baskets most tourists were buying. Green implicitly demonstrated through this account how her cultural capital, articulated as ‘taste,’ set her apart from other tourists. In telling this story Green presents herself as intrepid, instinctually aesthetic and culturally superior to the other tourist consumers. Discussing tourism and its relation to the experiences of post-modernity, Jon May notes that there is a ‘traditional separation of an authentic rural existence, and the increasing ‘inauthenticity’ of metropolitan life’ (May, 1994: 25) In this light Green’s interest in ‘local distinctiveness’ is, in a sense, as much about distinguishing herself as finding the distinctive Tunisia. In other words, this event and
the telling of this event are examples of cultural capital being displayed and perpetuated.

Green’s description of herself as cultured tourist suggests how narratives of authenticity might be understood as a form of cultural or historical tourism, available to a privileged few and invariably involving cultural and economic hierarchies (Urry, 1990). The politics of the relationship between authenticating narratives and Green’s cultural capital (her investment in her own cultural capital) became clear later. Green described her fear that local distinctiveness ‘is being eroded from our culture on all levels’ because of homogenisation threatened by mass manufacture.

*Polly: Why does this matter?*

Green: Do you know I’ve never thought why that’s important, it just is important. Isn’t that extraordinary, isn’t that a terrible thing to admit that I have never thought about it. I suppose I think that it’s important because in order for us to be, we need a sense of being rooted or being grounded to a place. Or if we are not grounded to a particular place that we can go round and see those places and acknowledge the differences in those places and the different influences that have, which have worked on those places and that’s what makes us human and that’s what makes us perceptive human beings. If everything was the same it would be stultifyingly breath-defyingly boring. When I travel that’s what I love to see, those differences, they may be very small. I think that the nuances have disappeared from food.…..forty years ago if you were a fly on the wall and you looked down on a family eating you would’ve been able to place them in their social context, in their economic context. You can’t do that anymore but so if you cling onto that local distinctiveness that is perhaps where you get your sense of adventure, your sense of originality, your sense of place. In fact Polly you’ve completely taken me back to think about why I think it’s important.30

This extract once again suggests how authenticating narratives are harnessed to counter anxieties discussed in the previous section pertaining to ‘place’ and ‘home’ in a post-modern context. Moreover this section suggests how authenticating narratives are essential to Green’s privileged cultural positioning. The unexamined nature of Green’s commitment to ‘local distinctiveness’ and authenticating narratives corroborates Bourdieu’s argument that a function of cultural capital is to naturalise social inequalities. In other words, Green’s cultural capital and ‘taste’ are self-referential and self-perpetuating and therefore beyond examination – by her own admission she has never questioned the importance of the practices she promotes. The relation between an

---

30 Interview with Henrietta Green, born in London 1948, cookery writer/organiser ‘Henrietta Green’s Food Lover’s Fairs’, recorded by Polly Russell 23.3.01, Tape 3 side B, C821/46/03
anxiety pertaining to place and identity and the politics of cultural capital is highlighted by Massey when she notes that those who are most concerned about the post-modern state are likely to speak from a position of relative power: ‘Those who tend to worry about a sense of disorientation and a loss of control must once have felt they knew exactly where they were, and that they had control.’ (Massey, 1992: 9) Green’s lament about the contemporary difficulty of classification, or more literally placing people in their class, is implicitly about the loss of power to define. Authenticating narratives and practices (local distinctiveness) are championed by Green on the basis of their ability to position and place people in relation to their social contexts. The unequal politics of this become clear when Green makes the point that ‘if we are not grounded to a particular place that we can go round and see those places and acknowledge the differences in those places.’ In other words, authenticity and cultural specificity pertains to a freedom, an ability to travel literally and metaphorically between different places and identities but this may not be available to all. Presumably even ‘if we are not grounded,’ authenticating narratives and practices ground others, position others relative to ‘us’ for ‘our’ cultural gratification. Green’s desire, explicitly stated, to return to a time ‘forty years ago’ when you would have been able to place people ‘in their social context and their economic context’ speaks of a post-modern sense of dislocation in the present that is bound up with and informed by a nostalgic longing for the social and economic hierarchies of the past. Authenticating narratives and practices are mobilised by and invested in by Green as a performance and perpetuation of her cultural capital - her status and her privilege.

The symbiotic relationship between cultural capital and authenticating narratives is similarly mobilised by D&M via the brand’s appeal to ‘discerning’ consumers. The authenticating narratives and practices mobilised to market D&M pies, as I have argued earlier, serve to disassociate the products of mass production from the practices of mass production. D&M pies, therefore, are identified with specialist, ‘authentic’ production practices that serve to distinguish the pies in the market place. These practices are aimed to appeal to the ‘connoisseur’ consumer, a person with economic and cultural capital:

Hallam: For a brand to stay around it has to grow at a sensible pace, if it grows too fast consumers will be sceptical and not trust it but D&M is not like that it’s about heritage, tradition, authenticity it’s attractive to A1, ABC1 and ladies and that strictly restricts where D&M can be placed......so in that case Waitrose is ideal but there are only about 120 stores. D&M are also in some Tesco’s and
some Sainsbury's but D&M don't know exactly which stores they are in. It's difficult because one person's pound is the same as any other person's pound.31

Authenticating narratives build 'trust' between the customer and the brand and, via recourse to 'heritage, tradition, authenticity' erase consumer 'scepticism' and appeal to the highest earning and most educated consumers -A1, ABC1 and 'ladies.' The products, moreover, are only available in quality supermarkets or in branches of supermarkets located in areas with affluent customers. Although in one sense Hallam is correct to say, 'one person's pound is the same as any other person's pound,' some consumers, from a branding perspective, are clearly more desirable than others. If the brand grows too fast, therefore, it risks losing its distinction and therefore its ability to appeal to customers with high economic and cultural capital. There are, therefore, obvious, commercially motivated reasons that the D&M brand targets wealthy consumers. The appeal to consumers with higher disposable income makes economic sense, providing D&M with wider profit margins despite incurring higher production, marketing and raw material costs than other lower priced pork pie products. The authenticating narratives of the D&M brand, however, are important not simply because they appeal to consumers with high economic capital but also because they appeal, via association with historical and geographical knowledge, to consumers invested in their own cultural capital. Authenticating narratives invoking historical and geographical knowledges are mobilised by the D&M brand to appeal to the 'educated' consumer to whom consumption is more a matter of choice based upon cultural capital rather than economic necessity. There is a relationship, therefore, between authenticating narratives, product cost, consumer wealth and cultural capital and this relationship is symbiotic. Authenticating narratives enable D&M to charge a higher price for their products but by purchasing D&M pork pies consumers partake in a consumption process that mediates their discomfort about mass manufacture and modern food production, connects them to local and national cultural practices and allows them to experience, perhaps display, their cultural capital. For Green and D&M authenticating narratives and practices are integrally related to and constitutive of cultural capital. Authenticating narratives legitimise and naturalise economic and cultural inequalities by appealing to 'taste' and knowledge and are thus reflective of the politics of social distinction that Bourdieu details.

31 Interview with Stephen Hallam (2001) Tape 4 Side B, C821/50/04
I have demonstrated, therefore, how Green’s investment in authenticating narratives is inextricably bound up with her cultural capital and how D&M appeals to customers with cultural capital as commercial strategy. However, I want to complicate this argument by suggesting that Bourdieu’s claim that cultural capital indicates economic freedom from the tastes of necessity does not wholly account for the widespread appeal of authenticating narratives. Bourdieu’s interpretation of necessity is an economic interpretation of the conditions of existence. His analysis makes a distinction between those tastes born of luxury (freedom from necessity) and those born of necessity. I want to argue that in the context of contemporary Britain the relation between cultural capital and authenticating narratives in relation to food is not only the result of economics and social distinction. Rather, authenticating narratives must be understood in conjunction with the health issues raised by the contemporary British food industry.

The distinction between necessity and luxury outlined by Bourdieu is complicated given contemporary fears about food production and health. In the last five years BSE has claimed 10 lives, the safety of GM foods has been questioned and foot and mouth disease has resulted in thousands of lost livelihoods and the slaughter of millions of livestock. The anxieties that authenticating narratives mediate, in this light, are best understood as the necessity of health and safety. In other words, Bourdieu’s research, set in 60s France, cannot account for the contemporary British experience of food and health scares where protecting health/safety of self, family and community is a necessary imperative and preoccupation. Narratives of authenticity appeal to consumers because they promise, in part, to deliver ‘safer’ food, ‘food you can trust’ and are therefore an expression of legitimate concerns about safety and food. Clearly Green’s investment in authenticating narratives pertains to a cultural capital born of a bourgeois up-bringing free from economic necessity. As she states:

Green: Having had the sort of background where I was brought up with money but quite sort of bourgeois but there was an element of taste…..I suppose what I am trying to say is that I am supremely confident in matters of taste, not just food I’m talking about, it’s everything, I’m not worried about my taste.32

But Green’s investment in authenticating narratives also speaks of wider concern about modern food production and safety. When talking about modern manufacturers, Green

32 Interview with Henrietta Green (2001) Tape 3 Side A, C821/46/03
states her 'suspicion that mechanised production of food is antithetical to quality' and her aim 'to make people better equipped to make food choices.' The food choices Green refers to are not the choices celebrated by mainstream retailers and free-market capitalism – the choice between one apple or another, one cereal or another. The choices Green attempts to make available are about traceability, sustainability and safety both for the producer and the consumer.

Green’s investment in authenticating narratives must be understood both as a performance of cultural capital and simultaneously as a means of promoting safe and healthy food choices in a climate of anxiety about modern food production. For both Green and Hallam this anxiety has significant economic effects. As I have previously noted, this research was undertaken in the context of concerns over genetically modified foods, at the tail end of the BSE crisis and during the foot and mouth crisis. While interviewing Green and Hallam the foot and mouth crisis resulted in significant economic losses. D&M had to stop production for three days due to a ban on pig sales and then had to import pork from Europe. The collapse of the tourist industry and the discontinuance of the weekly cattle market in Melton Mowbray for a period of weeks reduced D&M Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe sales by over 40%. Throughout the summer all of Green’s Food Lover’s Fairs had to be cancelled resulting in lost revenue for many small producers as well as Green. It is important to highlight that widespread concern about modern food production has very real economic and social effects and so cannot easily be dismissed as insignificant.

While others have noted both concerns about health and safety and food’s role as a marker of social distinction in contributing to determine food trends in the UK (Bourdieu, 1986; Bell & Valentine, 1997; Warde, 1997), the relation between the two has not been adequately accounted for. Significantly, these two distinct functions of authenticating narratives are inextricably linked. While authenticating narratives reflect a necessity of health and safety in relation to food, access to safe food is not equally distributed throughout society. In a talk about the future of farming in the UK John Humphries suggested that a ‘two-tier’ food industry and eating culture is emerging in the UK – one geared to those with the economic resources and cultural ‘know-how’ to produce and consume foods from ‘safe’ sources and another for those without the economic or cultural resources to make economic and educated choices about the food
they consume. The relation between authenticating narratives, cultural capital, economic capital and the cultural or economic ability to make informed choices about food consumption is not equally distributed. A cursory glance at the mainstream food retail market in the UK is telling. The retailer most closely associated with promoting ‘safe’ and trustworthy food is also the retailer with the most affluent consumer market – M&S. The reputation of M&S is based upon notions of innovation, quality and safety. M&S food technologists, those responsible for food safety, are renowned throughout the food industry for pioneering high standards of food production. M&S was, for instance, the first retailer to screen every egg for salmonella and the first to implement farm assurance schemes for beef production, long before the outbreak of the BSE crisis. Significantly M&S food development procedures invest a high degree of energy and resource in ensuring the ‘authenticity’ of recipes and raw ingredients. Food ‘experts’ are hired as consultants and developers travel the world sourcing products and ‘benchmarking’ dishes. The significance of authenticity in this context is clearly commercial and this commerciality cannot be disassociated from issues of cultural capital, safety and trust. Moreover other UK retailers with reputations for quality and safety – Waitrose and Sainsbury’s – are those, generally speaking, with more affluent customers. For those retailers who appeal to consumers primarily on the basis of price - ASDA, Morrison’s, Iceland and Safeway, for instance – quality is, at least at the level of marketing, a lesser concern.

I am suggesting that understanding authenticating narratives as simply the practice of cultural capital and the luxury of choice does not fully explain how they are mobilised by those with cultural and economic capital to mediate real and necessary fears about food safety. What Humphries terms the ‘counter revolution’ in foods – the growth of farmers markets, organic food consumption and growing consumer pressure with regard to all aspects of food production – explains, in part the appeal and prevalence of narratives of ‘authenticity’ in food production. The longing for ‘authenticity’, however, is simultaneously related to very real concerns about food safety as well as being bound up with the politics of nostalgia which produce and reflect specific class, race and

---

34 The notion of quality in relation to food is understood to be a constructed and contested term. For a full account of the different meanings associated with quality in food production see Ilbery & Kneafsey, 2006b.
gender relations. There is, in other words, an underlying generalised nostalgia and a mobilisation of this feeling in specific circumstances. While I acknowledge that authenticity is mobilised by those with cultural capital and is bound up with unexamined class relations and privilege, the appeal of authenticating narratives results, in part, from very real anxieties about modern food production and food safety. The ability to act on this anxiety and to choose food products that are associated with 'safe' production methods is, however, more readily available to those with higher economic and cultural capital. As Tim Lang argues, 'the poor, people on low incomes, have the worst range of choice and the worst access to healthy foods that you can get.' (2001: 1) In examining the politics of authenticating narratives, therefore, it is imperative to understand how issues of identity, social distinction and food safety are inextricably bound up with each other in ways that may disadvantage those without out cultural and economic resources.

6.7 Authenticity and Embodiment

Authenticating narratives and practices of food often refer to the embodied identity of a producer or cultural group. A prevalent example of this is the routine practice whereby food producers use their own name and image (Wing Yip Foods, Lloyd Grossman sauces and or Patak's Indian products for example) or another's name and image (Mrs Beeton's brand or Madhur Jaffrey's endorsement of Tilda rice for example) to promote their food products, brand or restaurant. This practice has been noted by Jackson's analysis of Pataks's curry sauces. The authenticity of the Patak's production process is guaranteed by the owners 'embodied identities and the links they draw between their domestic and commercial worlds' (2002: 9). The embodied connection between 'authentic' products and people, however, need not be named or explicit but can occur via product endorsement or association with a relevant individual or group. As discussed previously, Hallam is employed by Samworth Brothers' not so much for his knowledge of baking but to embody the performance of a baker and so lend authenticity to the D&M brand. At the most obvious level the embodied association between product and producer implies expertise, serves as a tacit guarantee of quality and consistency and reassures the consumer that they are purchasing the 'real thing', an 'authentic' product. Narratives of authenticity can, therefore, be appropriated as a means of self-commodification to serve commercial and personal goals and to engender trust in commercial food products.
While it is true that across the food industry embodied identities are invoked to articulate and perform authenticating narratives, the relationship between embodiment and authenticity is especially prevalent and relevant for 'ethnic' food producers. This is, perhaps, no surprise given that race and ethnicity are frequently (and problematically) imagined/positioned/produced in relation to the 'raced' body (geographically, culturally and biologically located) (Jackson, 1997; McClintock, 1995). For 'ethnic' producers, authenticating narratives and practices of food culture are configured, I argue, in relation to an embodied experience and expectation of ethnicity. As I have noted, Lu and Fine argue that the performance of ethnic authenticity staged in restaurants emphasises how both ethnicity and authenticity are constructions 'made real in cultural transactions' (1995: 535). This section takes this understanding of authenticity and ethnicity as a dynamic and negotiated process between the 'ethnic group' and its public to explore the embodied experiences of Deepak Sharma. Although I have mentioned Sharma previously it may be helpful to briefly describe him. Sharma is a 30 year old British-Indian who worked as a food buyer for 'International Foods' for Marks & Spencer (M&S) from 1999 for three years. At the time, the 'International Foods' department included Indian, Chinese and Italian foods and was worth a total of £50 million each year. With a family background in retail, Sharma started work at M&S in textiles but due to company changes was moved into the food division after a few months. Given that the following analysis details Sharma's ambition-driven attempts to mobilise authenticity as an embodied performance it is relevant to note that Sharma, by his own admission and from the comments of his colleagues, does not regard himself as a food expert or enthusiast. Sharma's insistence that he be given the Indian food range to manage was made possible by the cultural assumption of the association between identity and food. Sharma, I argue, mobilised these assumptions and, in a sense, emphasised, even performed, his Indianness to gain a better position. On moving into the 'International Department' Sharma approached the Department head and asked to be given the Indian range to manage:

Polly: What did you say to him then?
Sharma: Well just that you cannot pass this situation, you've got to give me Indian. I mean it's taken the business 4 years to realise they've got an Asian person here who eats curries four times a week and we've never actually asked him to taste our curries and tell us what he thinks! You cannot pass this

35 April Preston worked with Sharma for over three years as a product developer and jokingly commented to me off record that he knew very little about food
opportunity you must get me into Indian food and I would enjoy doing it because I love this food and it come naturally to me. So I forced my way into Indian....

Sharma saw the high profile Indian range as the logical area to nurture his career ambitions. Sharma’s argument for why he should be appointed Indian food buyer relies, in party, upon the embodied experience and performance of his Indianness. Sharma mobilises authenticating narratives and practices to position himself as a ‘natural’ ‘expert.’ It is through the embodied experience of being Indian – the repeated practice of eating curries, his self-proclaimed Asianness, his ‘passion’ and his ‘enjoyment’ – that Sharma argues his case to the department head.

Sharma’s willingness to harness his embodied knowledge and experience to further his career does not stop at gaining the Indian buyer position. In an explicit example of self-commodification, Sharma describes a possible strategy for gaining range recognition and improving product sales:

Sharma: We can encourage them to start coming to us to buy their curries because we can tell them ‘I promise you, I’m an Asian lad’ I can get on T.V. and say ‘I’m an Asian, I know curries and I promise you they are bloody good.’

Sharma suggests that by displaying his physical self on television in conjunction with M&S products, the range will be legitimised and authenticated. Sharma thus offers to harness the embodied experience of Indianness in a public performance to improve the commerciality of products. By emphasising his embodied association with M&S food products Sharma ‘promises’ that the quality will be both ‘good’ and ‘authentic’. Intrinsic to this ‘promise’ is a level of trust. In other words, Sharma’s embodied association with M&S ‘curries’ will mediate material and symbolic anxieties about quality and safety through an embodied performance of authenticity.

The relationship between performance, embodiment and authenticity is made even more explicit in an extract from Shezad Hussain, a Pakistani British M&S Indian food consultant. Describing her first visit to an M&S supplier factory, Hussain remarked:

Hussain: We were literally having to climb up this little ladder to look into a pan and the kettles, you know the huge ones, and I remember Cathy Chapman

36 Interview with Deepak Sharma, born in Leicester 1973, Marks & Spencer Food buyer, recorded by Polly Russell 24.8.00, Tape 2 Side A C821/39/02
37 Interview with Deepak Sharma (2000) Tape 2 Side A C821/39/02
hanging onto me from behind and saying ‘don’t fall in will you’ (laughs) and me saying ‘that will be really authentic then wouldn’t it’.

In this extract, Hussain’s physical self is the authenticating agent, that she knows, in part, she has been employed for. Hussain’s body is configured here as the essence of authenticity - as though if she could be cooked into the sauce in the vats the product would be rendered completely authentic. While in some contexts, therefore, the connection between embodiment and ethnicity may be limiting, both Sharma and Hussain understand that their embodied Indianness, can be mobilised for a commodified performance that further their own careers.

Although Sharma’s insistence that he was ‘naturally’ suited to the role of Indian food buyer was finally rewarded, his own ideas about authenticity clashed with the practices and assumptions of the company. Sharma described his idea of authenticity in relation to his home, his mother and his Indianness:

Sharma: I think authentic when I used it was what am I used to eating. Being an Asian person you don’t get more authentic than my mother making curries because she’s been cooking them in India for God’s sake where curries came from and she is now cooking them here and I am convinced they are authentic, it’s got to be authentic and what I was tasting at our suppliers was not what I had at home. So when you say to me what do you think is authentic, I think it’s what I eat on a day to day basis.

For Sharma what he understands as authenticity is legitimised through embodied practices at a number of different scales from India, to England through to home. In his explanation Sharma connects himself, via his mother, to India, ‘where curries come from.’ Sharma does not simply state that his mother came from India or even lived in India, the emphasis here is on his mother cooking in India (‘for God’s sake’) – his understanding of the authenticity of Indian food relies, therefore, not only on his own embodied experience but on his knowledge of his mother’s embodied experience living and cooking in India. The difference between the food Sharma understands to be authentic and the food positioned as authentic by the company points to a tension between embodied knowledge and the authenticating practices adopted by the M&S business:

38 Interview with Shezad Hussain (2000) Tape 4 Side B C821/36/04
39 As others have noted, ‘curry’ is a fabricated product and the result of Anglo-Indian historical relations rather than being ‘authentically’ Indian (see Narayan, 1995).
Sharma: At home we would either have a chicken curry or a lamb curry or a dahl or a vegetable curry and that might be in different formats but very rarely would my mother come to the dining table and say ‘oh we’re having a Madras or chicken jalfrezi’ - it used to be one style of curry and that is what we have and that’s what we had and that’s the only way she knew how to make it in all honesty.40

Sharma’s description of the daily practice of eating Indian food at home complicates the discourses and practices of authenticity perpetuated by M&S. For Sharma, what is authentic is ‘one style of curry’ ‘that might be in different formats,’ eaten every day in the family home. When he imagines his mother saying ‘oh we’re having a Madras or a chicken jalfrezi,’ Sharma affects a joke ‘posh’ accent as though to emphasise how false or unnatural this would seem. The practice of marketing regional Indian dishes defines much of the focus of multi-national Indian ranges. This both enables more products to be added to the core range and, via allusion to specialist knowledge, confers authenticity upon the products. The irony here, of course, is that while the authenticating narratives mobilised to legitimise and market retail products rely upon imagined embodied connections, these products bear no relation to the embodied daily experience of an Indian household in Britain. The discrepancy between what is ‘normal’ and therefore ‘authentic’ for Sharma, and what is ‘special’ and therefore ‘authentic’ for M&S, points to the distance between Sharma’s lived and embodied knowledge and the knowledges learned and appropriated by mainstream corporate culture to authenticate ‘foreign’ products. This is not a case of one or other being ‘more’ authentic but an example of how authenticity is constructed, performed, negotiated and experienced in practice. As Sharma reveals, being an Indian food buyer for M&S demanded a recognition of authenticity as pragmatic, contextual and qualified:

Polly: What does authenticity mean to you now?
Sharma: Difficult one because I think different to me to our consumers because when I came into the department the word I used five times in every sentence I spoke was authenticity. I thought curries were all about authentic curries. When you start understanding the customer and what they are currently using it for when authentic is important there are other things that are more important.41

Nevertheless, Sharma’s acknowledgement that his own understanding of authenticity is at odds with the authenticating practices of the M&S range, and his realisation that authenticity is not the only determining factor for customer choice, does not prevent him

40 Interview with Deepak Sharma (2000) Tape 2 Side A, C821/39/02
41 Interview with Deepak Sharma (2000) Tape 2 Side B, C821/39/02
from seeing the commercial advantage of associating M&S Indian food with Asian people:

Sharma: One of the things I tried to do when I came into the curry business was try and affiliate our curries with Asian people and Asian people who are known for being Asian .... I think that affiliation with Asian people to create that mindset with our core customer base that if Asian people eat our curries it must be good this is the affiliation we should have had.42

Sharma knows that Asian people are not M&S ‘core customers’ and do not routinely eat M&S curries. As he stated, ‘there was always this thing that this isn’t for an Indian household, we mustn’t forget that we mustn’t make it too hot, it should be creamy.’43 Sharma also knows that the food his mother cooks, what he understands through his embodied knowledge as ‘authentic’, is different to the food sold at M&S but he understands the commercial implications of the implicit connection made by authenticating narratives between Indian food and embodied Indianness. When he explained what, ideally, he would change about the M&S Indian range this was made clear:

Sharma: If I had it my own way I think that now with the movement in manufacturing of Indian curries with people like Noon and S&A I think we are completely insane to keep buying from a white organisation .... it should be run by Indian people who make curries seven times a week, live off the stuff, know exactly how to make a good curry, a bad curry and curry is their life.44

This extract demonstrates how Sharma’s belief that Indian food products should be associated with Indian people is not only about the appearance of an embodied connection but the practice of an embodied connection. It is, therefore, not merely an association with Indian people that Sharma thinks is necessary, those Indian people must be involved in the production, the daily making of products. This echoes both the extract where Sharma defines authenticity in relation to the embodied daily practice of his mother’s cooking and Hussain’s exclamation about falling into a sauce vat. It is also reminiscent of Hallam’s suggestion that the ethnic mix in the D&M shoppe is ‘naturally’ white, even though pork pies are produced, in part, by people of mixed ethnicity. Each of these examples suggests a slippage between embodied authenticity (Indianness, Englishness) as a commercial performance staged for others, and embodied authenticity as lived daily practice. It is through mobilising this slippage that both

42 Interview with Deepak Sharma (2000) Tape 2 Side B, C821/39/02
43 Interview with Deepak Sharma (2000) Tape 2 side A, C821/39/02
44 Interview with Deepak Sharma (2000) Tape 2 Side B C821/39/02

234
Sharma and Hussain are able to ensure their professional advancement. For Sharma, though he understands authenticity as a negotiated performed space, it is nevertheless through embodied experience that authenticity has the most meaning and commercial application. I am not suggesting that the possibilities of the relationship between embodiment and authenticating narratives are always or inevitably positive. My account of narratives of multiculturalism detailed how Indian food manufacturer Perween Warsi’s re-branding of her company’s image was driven by a desire to escape the limitations of the embodied association between her ethnicity and her factory so she could branch out into other, non Indian, markets. I acknowledge, therefore, that authenticity is always political and problematic. This chapter argues, however, that the relation between authenticating narratives and embodiment produces a problematic and ambivalent space that can be mobilised and appropriated for personal gain in certain contexts. This not only supports the recognition of authenticity as contingent, constructed and contextual, but also suggests how any reading of embodied performances of authenticity must account for the degree of agency involved.

6.8 Authenticity Reworked

This final section considers how the creative space of top quality restaurants enables two restaurateurs, Alan Yau and Peter Gordon, to rework and reinterpret authenticating narratives and practices to suit their commercial and political agendas. I argue that Yau’s approach to authenticity in relation to his restaurant Hakkasan combines not only the commercial pragmatism witnessed at an early age, but also his attempts to resist being limited by any ethnic classification. He describes himself as a ‘world citizen’ and insisted on at least three occasions that he did not want to be seen to be representing the Chinese British community. Yau’s resistance to being identified by or limited by his ethnicity, relates to his commercial and cultural resistance to the limitation of narratives around authenticity and this has helped to shape and direct his commercial ventures. Gordon’s more explicit rejection of authenticity is similarly connected to his early experiences cooking in Australia as well as his political resistance to the limitations offered by traditional identity discourses and practices.

Yau, as discussed in the previous chapter, started the noodle chain Wagamama and more recently opened a restaurant called Hakkasan, with the stated objective of wanting to reinvigorate the stagnant Chinese food market in London. Yau recognises the value
of tradition and authenticity but refuses to be limited or constrained by it. Instead, Yau interprets and adapts the meaning and practice of authenticity to suit his political and commercial agenda. The combination of pragmatism and politics that Yau applies to his understanding of authenticity was learned, in part, during his childhood in the late 60s in rural Britain when he watched and assisted his parents cooking in a typical chop suey house:

Polly: *What did you all think of the food being served at the restaurant?*
Yau: We felt it was really, what the word we used I don’t know if there is a word was ‘Whitefied’, yeah, ‘Whitefied’ Chinese food. Like Balti. It really was something you would not eat, especially something like Egg Foo Yong... in terms of the core heading of the menu I find it very strange that people would like these things in terms of core Sweet Sour heading, the curry heading, and egg foo yong heading......the whole thing is really quite processed and logical so you find the popularity for one cooking style and one combination so you repeat the whole thing so I guess that’s why Chinese food has become so long. Like black bean sauce, you find it’s popular and you take it all the way down from chicken to prawn to beef and so on whereas in Hong Kong, because of the heaviness of the meat black bean sauce tend to be used with meat, a combination that works really well. That’s why I say tuna works really well. Similarly sweet sour traditionally is only with pork, so the pork is actually good with the sweet and sour but in order to appease the eating public we are offering with other meat.

Polly: *Is there a problem with that?*
Yau: A problem, no. You can’t really criticise that because it introduce mass market, it allow Chinese food to develop as a mass market food. I was going to say cuisine but I think that’s over the top.45

In this description Yau acknowledges the ‘strangeness’ of the ‘whitefied’ chop suey menu but is not wholly critical of it. Yau’s explanation of the logic of the menu, one driven by popularity and compromise rather than any purist notion of authenticity, points to his appreciation for the commercial pragmatism of his parents’ chop suey business. Yau’s decision not to use the word ‘cuisine’ to describe the food served at a typical chop suey restaurant indicates an awareness rather than judgement that versions of authenticity are determined and valued differentially by different markets.

Yau, therefore, does not reject the concept outright, but rather reworks it to suit his political and commercial agenda:

*Polly: Why wouldn’t you use the word ‘authentic’?*
Yau: Because it’s em..em..because some of the tastes they use is authentic. Because to me, because to me there is a difference in terms of terminology in

45Interview with Alan Yau (2001) Tape 3 Side B, C821/61/3
term between traditionalism and authenticity. I think traditionalism is something where you follow blindly to an art or to something you know in its absolute state.

Polly: Can you give me an example of that?

Yau: A good example of that is say in martial art where the style of the ceremonial side as well as the initiation as well as the form of the art is much more, is as important as the, you know, as the fighting discipline and so on. Er it’s almost spiritual in that sense whereas what the likes of, I know it’s a cliché, what the likes of Bruce Lee is able to come up, able to do, I still think what he applies is authentic but it is not traditional in terms of taking elements of it and what he want at the end of the day in terms of a working philosoph is what matters to him is the quickest and easiest way to drop a person down, you know, almost as if what he is saying is form doesn’t really matter and the spirituality of the thing doesn’t matter and that’s it. So in that sense in cooking side what I mean by that is that I think what I mean by that is that the authenticity of what is Chinese comes from the ingredients and also from the precepts of what is traditional in terms of those ingredients in terms of salt and pepper, black bean sauce, ginger and spring onion, sweet and sour, ch, five spice sauce and so on. To me those are really quintessential authentic cooking combinations of what is Chinese. But what you can do with those is something else. For example people say using a certain item is not authentic but I think what they mean is it’s not traditional in terms of you can use tuna, I think tuna goes really well with black bean sauce but tuna as a fish is not traditional but I think it’s authentic because the taste, the quintessential Chineseness has not been compromised. So in that sense I think certain things they use is authentic but they just adapt to be much more accessible in terms of cost, in terms of availability of raw material as well as what people is willing to accept at that time.  

The distinction Yau makes between authenticity and tradition is ultimately pragmatic and commercial. Yau’s description of the business of food and the comparison between himself and Bruce Lee, illustrates how he envisages tradition as static and authenticity as dynamic and negotiated. What is authentic for Yau is partly what works in terms of flavour, what retains the ‘quintessential Chineseness,’ but also what is ‘accessible in terms of cost, in terms of availability.’ Authenticity is configured here less as specialist knowledge or rigid practice but as a negotiated space, subject to reworking, interpretation in conjunction with the practicalities of daily life.

Peter Gordon, a chef and owner of London restaurant The Providores, similarly recognises the value of tradition but resists the idea of authenticity. Gordon was born in the early 60s in New Zealand and has travelled extensively in Malaysia and India on numerous occasions. Gordon cites these travels, along with the cooking traditions of his

46 Interview with Alan Yau (2001) Tape 3 Side B, C821/61/3
part-Maori grandmother, as being key influences for the ‘fusion’ cooking style with which he is so closely associated. Though Gordon’s interest in food started from a young age, he states that it was in moving to Australia and working as a chef in Sydney that he started developing an interest in ‘fusion’ cooking. Fusion food, otherwise known as ‘EastWest’, combines ingredients and cooking methods from different culinary cultures to create new dishes. This style of cooking is now synonymous with contemporary Australian, New Zealand and Californian food. It is no coincidence that Australia, New Zealand and California, with their diverse populations, range of raw ingredients and relative lack of rigid historical food traditions have been homes to this style of cooking. Gordon’s move to the UK in 1991 and the opening of the successful restaurant, The Sugar Club, introduced ‘fusion’ food to Britain for the first time.

Although Gordon’s cooking receives general critical acclaim, some critics in the UK do not approve of what they feel is a random combining of styles and flavours. Gordon acknowledges that without due care fusion food can fail:

Gordon: It can be so airy fairy...there are bad combinations, there are some flavours which just don’t work together, and the way you cook things makes a difference. For fusion like this it is more confusion because it’s every ingredient that exists.

Polly: Why is there an obsession with ethnic food having to be authentic?

Gordon: I think original and traditional recipes should be preserved but if I had to stick to classic recipes my menus would read like a food encyclopaedia...it’s the flavours I love so much and there’s no room for experimentation. I think it’s because people are frightened of new tastes...everything is from everywhere, there is nothing that is indigenous. I just get so tired of it all.  

For Gordon ‘traditional recipes’ should be ‘preserved’ but to slavishly adhere to them would limit his creativity and experimentation. Gordon does not rework authenticity. He rejects the premise of authenticity stating that ‘everything is from everywhere.’

Gordon’s approach to cooking is an everyday and practical realisation of recent arguments about cultural hybridity (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Young, 1995). Rather than explaining cultural hybridity as a blend of separate (authentic) cultures combining, cultures are understood to always be hybrid. As Gordon recognises, the fusion food he cooks involves combining ingredients and cooking techniques that are already the results of past forms of fusion.

---

47 Interview with Peter Gordon, born in New Zealand 1963, chef/restaurateur/cookery writer/consultant, recorded by Polly Russell 3.7.01, Tape 11 Side B, C821/51/11
I argue that for both Yau and Gordon their interpretations of authenticity are made possible by a combination of their commercial confidence, their cultural and economic capital, their autonomy at work, the space afforded by fashionable and exclusive restaurants and their understandings of their ethnic identities and cultural contexts. The authenticity envisaged and practiced by Yau would be impossible for Sharma or Hallam, for example, who function in the spaces of mainstream retail which require clearly boundaries, simpler logic and processes and narratives involving considerable transparency.

6.9 Summary
Although others have recognised the constructed, contingent and contextual nature of authenticating narratives of culinary culture, there has been little detailed analysis of how these are appropriated and mobilised by different actors in different biographical and commercial contexts. This chapter has detailed a range of these, suggesting a connection between authenticating narratives and anxieties about food production, the practices of nostalgic imaginaries of Britishness, the production and performance of cultural capital and the embodied experience of identity in relation to food production. Finally this chapter detailed how two restaurateurs rework, interpret and reject authenticity to suit their commercial and creative endeavours. This chapter illustrates, therefore, that to read authenticating narratives through a single lens – either to prove or disprove authenticity or as a positive or negative construct – has led to a failure to recognise how authenticity is experienced, mobilised and negotiated in practice. In examining the politics at play in authenticating narratives my account suggests that these can be appropriated from a range of positions with varying degrees of reflexivity and with a range of practical and political outcomes. This provides, I hope, a more open and less predictable politics of authenticity than in most conventional accounts and one that illustrates how authenticating narratives connect a range of scales including the home, region and nation through embodied performances and everyday commercial practices. Moreover, the preoccupation with authenticating narratives in food production highlights how food is bound up with material and symbolic anxieties that can be mediated through nostalgic associations with past places and social relations.
Finally I want to highlight my recognition that narratives of authenticity are inextricably bound up with narratives of multiculturalism and domesticity discussed in previous chapters. The connection between authenticity and domesticity is encapsulated by Anne Hughes’ research on the lives of rural women. As she notes, ‘a particular construction of rural femininity has developed, linking womanhood and domesticity with notions of the organic community, a construction that has been reproduced within a number of contemporary writings about the rural’ (Hughes, 1997:125). Narratives of domesticity that produce idealised associations between women, the home and cooking also produce, in part, idealised and nostalgic imaginings of rural Britain. This version of Britishness, as I have documented, is, in part, perpetuated and produced through narratives of authenticity and commercial food culture. By contrast, I have suggested that narratives of multicultural culinary culture are bound up with contemporary imaginings of Britain as modern, urban and multi-ethnic. As I have detailed, there are complex and contradictory politics at play in narratives of multicultural culinary culture, in particular the production and representation of ‘ethnic’ others through association with particular food products and practices. The relation between narratives of multicultural culinary culture and narratives of authenticity, especially those that are used to explain and describe ‘traditional’ Britishness are therefore, mutually constituted.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

In setting out the conclusions to this project it is perhaps helpful to re-emphasise its central aims:

- To examine food’s relation to identity in the commercial practice of culinary culture without limiting my analysis to one particular identity discourse.

- To identify the major narratives of British culinary culture and to understand the ways in which these are bound up with the politics and practices of identity in relation to individual food producer life stories.

- To produce a cultural account of food production and as such highlight production as a complicated, negotiated and political process that is symbolically and materially significant.

- To assess the advantages and limitations of the life story methodology in providing an empirical account of food production and in analysing identity as a contingent and situated process.

By way of assessing the contribution of my research to these various aims I will consider each in turn.

7.2 Food and Identity

Around the time I first embarked on my research the then incumbent Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, used the example of Chicken Tikka Masala in his arguments in favour of devolution, union with Europe and British multiculturalism. At the same time, a range of research examining British culinary culture, much of it focused on food’s role in
discursively (re)producing ethnicity, was published (Cook & Crang, 1996; Cook et al., 1996, 1998, 1999). Though aimed at different audiences, both types of discourse highlighted how food, in complicated ways, is bound up with the politics of ethnicity.

Influenced by these debates, my initial research aims were focused on food's relationship to ethnicity and the commercial practice of food production. In particular, I sought to account for the experiences of food producers involved in different areas of British culinary culture. While academic approaches to culinary culture demonstrated the role of food in (re)producing ethnicity and in distinguishing between 'others' and 'ourselves', I wanted to empirically examine the politics of this process as one experienced by specific food producers as part of their daily working lives. In other words, I felt that critical examinations of the politics and practices of culinary culture did not fully account for the ways that individual food producers experienced, negotiated, contested and mobilised the relation between food and ethnicity in the commercial practices of the food industry. I was interested in how experiences of food's relation to ethnicity differed for differentially empowered social actors. Initially, then, my project was aimed at adding to a set of debates about the role of ethnicity in the commercial practice of food production.

The process of recording individual life stories and engaging with theoretical texts, however, necessarily extended my initial focus. In other words, it became evident that to focus exclusively on ethnicity precluded further understanding of identity as produced across a range of scales and through other narratives, of which food and its relation to ethnicity is only one. This research made clear the impossibility of talking about ethnicity and food without considering how ethnicity is discursively constructed through other identity discourses. Although I anticipated that a person's ethnicity could not be predetermined by their commercial relation with food (in fact, my initial research design explicitly set out to unsettle straightforward connections between food and ethnicity), it was also apparent that a person's ethnicity could not be divorced from other identity categories, including, for instance, gender and class. Reducing the scope of my analysis to the narrow category of ethnicity was, therefore, both theoretically and methodologically unsatisfactory.

As a number of researchers have demonstrated, food and food practices play a key role, both materially and symbolically, in determining how a range of identity categories are produced,
represented and experienced. A great deal of this work has been invaluable in directing my research, not least because it complicates and challenges naturalised assumptions about food and identity, as well as highlighting how these assumptions are produced through material processes, one of which is the commercial practice of food production. My research highlights food production as a culturally laden practice determined by a combination of personal, political, material and symbolic characteristics, associations and constraints. In particular, food production practices are constitutive of discourses of identity including, but not limited to, ethnicity, class and gender. While most literature to date has tended to focus on food and a particular identity category - ethnicity (Kalcik, 1984; Lu & Fine, 1995), gender (Charles & Kerr, 1988; De Vault, 1991; Murcott, 1983) or class (Bourdieu, 1984; Warde, 1997) – my research has sought to interrogate their interrelation through a focus on the narratives of culinary culture. While others have examined different narratives of British culinary culture as discursively producing identity across a range of scales (Cook et al, 1996, 1998, 1999; James, 1996), this work has tended to emphasise class or ethnicity, rather than these categories' mutual constitution.

7.3 Food Narratives

Each of my empirical chapters examined three major narratives of British culinary culture as a means of assessing the relation between food production and food producer identity. These narratives enabled me to account for British culinary culture and its relation to the practices and politics of lived identity. By shifting my focus from food production and ethnicity towards the major narratives of the food industry, it has been possible to examine not only how food's relation to identity manifests itself in the commercial practices of food production, but also how different identity discourses are related, constituted and reproduced. A central aim of my thesis, therefore, has been to identify the key narratives of the British food industry as a means of examining food's relation to identity, without reducing my analysis to one particular identity category. My analysis of the life stories of food producers suggests that the narratives of multicultural, domesticity and authenticity that are a prevalent feature of British culinary culture are constituted by and productive of discourses of ethnicity, gender and class that cannot be explained outside one another.

While the first empirical chapter suggests how discourses of ethnicity are made manifest through narratives of multicultural culinary culture, the second and third empirical
chapters focus on the food industry’s narratives of domesticity and authenticity. The life stories of food producers suggest that at different times and with different results, food producers can mobilise the assumed relation between identity and food in ways that can be commercially, politically and personally beneficial.

Although I have analysed these narratives in three separate chapters, I would like to draw attention to their overlaps – to the ways they are mutually constituted in more or less obvious ways. For instance, in arguing that narratives of domesticity play a part in producing idealised and nostalgic imaginings of ‘home’ and the ‘traditional’ gendered relations associated with it, I also recognise their connection to narratives of multicultural and authenticity. Narratives of multicultural culinary culture, as I have outlined, are produced by and productive of the ways that contemporary ‘Britishness’ and ‘otherness’ are imaginatively constructed. This construction is made possible through an implicit contrast with and opposition to the imagined places, practices and social relations of the past that are so central to the appeal and pervasiveness of narratives of domesticity and authenticity. While the relation between narratives of domesticity and the discursive practices of gender might seem apparent, therefore, my analysis of food producers’ life stories suggests ways in which they are also implicitly related to the discursive practices of race, place and their intersections. Although, for instance, Perween Warsi’s commercial enterprise is partially enabled by the association between her Indian identity and her specialist knowledge of Indian food, this is also facilitated and made possible through a gendered discourse that legitimises and naturalises an association between women, cooking and caring. Similarly, in my third empirical chapter I described how narratives of authenticity can be a means by which ‘traditional’ Englishness and Britishness are produced and naturalised. Narratives of authenticity, therefore, are implicitly related to narratives of multiculture and discourses of ethnicity discussed in the first chapter.

The ways in which nostalgic narratives of domesticity are connected with narratives of authenticity is, perhaps, more obvious. In other words, gendered discourses that are central to narratives of domesticity are also a feature of narratives of authenticity. As my examination of the narratives of authenticity demonstrates, authenticity for some food producers is legitimised through embodied association with the domestic practices and performances of women, particularly mothers. In addition, my analysis of Stephen Hallam and the Dickinson Morris Pork Pie brand illustrates how narratives of authenticity champion ‘traditional’ imaginings of past places and people in which the ‘traditional’ home and associated practices and social
relations play a key role. Narratives of domesticity, therefore, are central to Dickinson Morris but so too are narratives of ethnic identity. Hallam and the white ‘ladies’ who work in the shop guarantee the brand’s association with ‘traditional’ Britishness and ethnic whiteness, and they simultaneously protect the brand from the potentially polluting association with the Asian factory workers who mass produce pork pies.

In addition, my analysis suggests that nostalgic imaginings of domesticity and authenticity serve to mediate anxieties about food safety and food production. Both forms of narrative enable food producers to connect their embodied identities with particular foods and food practices as a form of legitimisation and emotional endorsement. Given the current context of food scares resulting, in part, from intensive food production, my analysis of the nostalgic appeal of domesticity and authenticity is particularly significant. In summary, therefore, different identity discourses are mutually constituted through the prevalent narratives of British culinary culture – multiculture, domesticity and authenticity - and these narratives cannot be disassociated from the material concerns raised by incorporation and by contemporary commercial food production.

7.4 Food Producers

Another aim was to situate the accounts and experiences of individual food producers within and in relation to these narratives and so provide an account of food production as a lived and negotiated practice. Although my thesis bears little resemblance to how it was envisaged over three years ago, some of the concerns that fuelled my initial interest in British culinary culture are a constant refrain throughout this final version. In particular, my preliminary suspicion that cultural accounts of food production and food producers were insufficient was confirmed by further analysis. In other words, though much research has considered the significance of food consumption and its relation to the politics of identity (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Gillespie, 1995; Narayan, 1995; Valentine, 1999), or food production from an economic, geographic and agro-scientific perspective (Goodman & Watts, 1997; Marsden, 2000), there has been a notable absence of empirical accounts of the cultural geography of food production. A significant contribution of this thesis is to begin to assess how the main identity narratives in British culinary culture are mobilised, experienced and contested by individuals commercially involved in the food industry.
That food production and food producers, generally speaking, have been neglected by cultural theorists is especially significant given the dramatic events that have been shaping British food production since 1999. While it is not necessary to discuss these here in detail, a brief mention of the key events is worth noting. My research started, for instance, in the aftermath of the BSE crisis. This crisis significantly dented consumer confidence in beef and meat products, forced many farmers out of business and drew attention to the possible dangers of mass-produced, low-cost meat. Soon after this, a considerable proportion of British consumers began to voice their objections to genetically modified (GM) food products, leading to a wide scale banning of GM ingredients by many large retailers, and the near collapse of the GM soya market in Europe and South America. At the start of 2001, meanwhile, the foot and mouth crisis precipitated the slaughter of thousands of livestock, the banning of British meat for sale across Europe, the effective closure of large portions of the British countryside and a consequent slump in British tourism. As I write this conclusion, moreover, the Safeway supermarket chain is at the centre of a bidding war involving six large retailers. Its eventual purchase will result in further consolidation and concentration of food production and retail in the United Kingdom.

A significant effect of these events has been the decline in confidence of many British consumers in food produced by intensive practices, and in the large scale food producers that dominate and determine much of British culinary culture. In this context, two apparently contradictory images of food producers have emerged. On the one hand are those producers - particularly large industrialised farmers, manufacturers and retailers - who are held responsible for endangering public health and precipitating the demise of the ‘traditional’ British countryside. Against this, are beleaguered small-scale food producers – shopkeepers, craft-persons and restaurateurs – who are championed as guardians of regional diversity, food safety and thriving community. In the academic sphere in recent years, cultural accounts have emphasised both consumption and consumers as complicated, contested and contradictory (Miller, 1995, 2001; Miller et al 1998). The failure to provide similarly full accounts of food production and producers means that generalised narratives of food producers as either demonic or heroic prevail. Throughout my thesis I have argued that theoretical distinctions between production and consumption have resulted in insufficient accounts of production as a contested and complicated terrain that food producers negotiate on a daily basis. Another contribution
of my thesis, therefore, has been to examine food production as a material and symbolic process done by people with specific subjectivities, histories and identities. Individual food producers negotiate the discursive association between food and identity, and anxieties about food safety, through mobilising the narratives of culinary culture I have considered. These individuals bring into play their histories, embodied identities and narrative explanations to connect themselves - with different degrees of reflexivity - to particular processes, narratives and practices.

7.5 Food and Life Histories

One of the most innovative aspects of my research has been the use of oral history life stories to investigate narrative constructions of British culinary culture. As I have detailed, the life story approach provides a means of empirically grounding abstract theoretical debates about the politics of identity and their relation to food and food practices. Most importantly, the life story approach insists on accounting for the multiplicity, complexity and ambiguity of identity as an everyday practice. Life stories highlight, for example, that individuals' narrative descriptions of their commercial practices are saturated with references to other aspects of their lives. Using the life story method demands taking seriously the recognition that identity is situated, contextual and relational. In both methodological and theoretical terms, therefore, the life story method is compatible with the notion of narrative identity outlined by Somers (1994).

The life story method has provided an empirical means of considering a producer’s commercial engagement with culinary culture as part of the wider context of their lives. This methodology not only insists on conceiving identity as a relational and political process (involving delineations of difference that are inscribed with unequal power relations) and as constructed through a range of narratives, but also on resisting and refuting identity as naturalised or essential.

By interrogating the intersections of food, individual emotions and histories, and commercial retail practices, my research situates the subjective within the sphere of production. In so doing I assess the relations between work and home, food production and food consumption, narrative and practice, and the relation of all of these to discourses of identity and food in contemporary Britain. A key aim, therefore, was to
examine the relation between narrative constructions of self and the material practice of food production. As my empirical chapters demonstrate, the narrative construction of identity for individuals is, differentially, bound up with the narratives of culinary culture such as multiculture, domesticity and authenticity.

Using life stories to examine something as vast and nebulous as British culinary culture is a reminder that all processes, discourses and practices are constructed, negotiated and contested on a daily basis by differentially empowered individuals. To use the life story method means accounting for people's histories, subjectivities and ideas, while recognising how these are constrained, limited and produced. In addition, because life stories are co-constructions, with the narrator at least partially determining the material collected, life story research is likely to be empirical rather than pre-suppositional.

The life story method, therefore, raises a number of questions about the politics of research and interpretation. In particular, the time involved and areas covered in life story research involve the researcher and narrator in a complicated relationship that often spills beyond the boundaries of 'official' research. Inevitably this relation, and its development, determines the material collected and also the analytical interpretation. This, for some, may be a significant cause for objecting to life story research on the grounds that it may result in a less objective analysis. I hope to have demonstrated, however, that because the life story method blurs distinctions between researcher and researched, it forces the researcher to reflect upon the politics of that relation and, most importantly, the politics of research more generally. Although my interpretations have been reached in relation to a set of questions explored in the social sciences, my awareness of issues of reflexivity and my appropriation of the life story method is significant. In as much as the techniques pioneered by others can add sensitivity and insight to the interview process and subsequent analysis, they are extremely constructive.

7.6 Research Directions

Inevitably, a project of this nature has its limitations, and raises questions requiring further research. If life stories highlight how individuals are situated within and produced through wider discursive framings they also make impossible a singular or final analysis of a life. I am aware, for instance, that my particular account of food
producer life stories and food production is only one of a number of interpretations that could have resulted from the same material. A clear advantage of the particular context of my work has been the archiving of the recordings I have collected at the British Library National Sound Archive. Complete summaries of my interviews, subject to interviewee consent, will be available via the National Sound Archive on-line catalogue Cadensa¹ and recordings will be made available to the public via the British Library. This will enable future researchers to access unedited copies of the recordings and so corroborate, complicate or add to my own interpretations. More specifically, these recordings might be used to form the basis of historical work on the food industry within living memory or provide biographical material on particular individuals.

Inevitably my study of 40 food producers is necessarily limited and qualitative research of this sort cannot make generalized claims. The experiences of the narrators I have discussed, for example, will not necessarily hold for all food producers, particularly those involved with different areas of the food industry. Further research is required to corroborate and develop the findings proposed here. I have, moreover, focussed on three narratives of culinary culture and their relation to the discursive practices of ethnicity, gender and class. Clearly this does not exhaust the identity discourses produced through food and food production. Future research considering, for instance, food production and the politics of vegetarianism, health and sexuality would add a new dimension to the analysis provided here.

Aside from the more general issues and advantages raised by using the life story method, the process is particularly relevant for research focused on food and food practices. Given the resistance of these, both materially and symbolically, to ‘stay put’, the life story offers a means of accounting for the different meanings and experiences of food throughout a life. My analysis uses life stories to focus on food production and its relation to the politics and practices of identity in Britain. Given current debates resulting from the 2001 Poverty Report², increasing hostility towards asylum seekers and the recent BNP victory in Halifax³, issues of identity continue to shape and determine contemporary life in Britain. Food, as I have described, is a key means

¹ http://cadensa.bl.uk
² http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/930.asp
³ The Guardian, 28th January, 2003 p.1
through which the politics of identity are materially experienced and shaped, and understanding how these are negotiated and contested as part of commercial practice cannot be disassociated from current public and political debates about British identity.

Moreover, given the numbers who work in the food industry in the UK, the economic and cultural, not to mention material, significance of food production cannot be underestimated. Understanding the experiences, motivations and challenges negotiated by those people who produce food commercially is essential not only as a form of historical documentation, but also to enhance our understanding of the food system. A cultural approach to food production not only adds to current research therefore, but provides an opportunity to draw together apparently divergent approaches. In order to move towards this, I plan starting collaborative research on an ESRC funded project, ‘Manufacturing Meaning Along the Food Commodity Chain’. The team working on this project include a cultural geographer, a political economist and an oral historian. Adopting a ‘commodity chain’ approach to food provision and consumption, this project takes a person-and-product centered perspective on the cultural meanings and political economy of food. The research design integrates different methodological approaches including focus groups, documentary research and life history interviews and will provide a unique opportunity to conduct an analysis of the food commodity chain that recognises the significance of institutional policies and practices, commercial imperatives and human subjectivities.

While I recognise the limitations of my own study, I hope that my research has demonstrated food production as a rich and, in some respects, relatively under-explored, area for future research. Ultimately I hope that my work will encourage social scientists to consider using life story interviews and especially to enhance our understandings of food and its role in shaping a range of political practices in contemporary Britain.
Appendix 1: Information outlining NLSC project aims and life story procedure. This was sent to all potential narrators as part of the interview recruitment procedure.

The British Library National Sound Archive

National Life Story Collection

Oral History of Food and Culinary Culture in Britain

Information for Participants

*Food and Culinary Culture in Britain* is part of the National Life Story Collection’s project on *Food: from Source to Salespoint*. This project aims to record the personal histories of people who have been involved with the production, distribution, marketing and selling of food in Britain. Despite being a nation that currently eats more curry than fish and chips and more kebabs than custard, the experiences of those people who have shaped transformations in British food culture have been little documented.

Through a series of recorded interviews this project will preserve the memories of those who have witnessed and contributed to changes in British culinary culture. Equally important, the project will explore the relationship between identity, food and ‘ethnic’ heritage for different people. The in-depth interviews will encompass memories from childhood to present day, noting changes that have taken place from generation to generation. Shop owners, importers, restaurateurs, chefs, well-known food personalities and manufacturers will be among those interviewed.

We would like you to record your life story so that present and future generations will be able to hear about the lives of those who have been involved in the food industry. People who have been interviewed for other NLSC oral history projects have said they enjoyed having the opportunity to reflect on life events and to leave a long-standing legacy in their own words about their lives and experiences.

Being interviewed involves recording your life story, feelings and views on audio-cassette. A trained interviewer will guide you, but not restrict you, with questions. The one-to-one interviews can take place at the interviewee’s house or office, in a room at the British Library or in any other quiet place. The average length of an interview is 6 hours and can be recorded over a number of sittings at the interviewee’s convenience. Recordings with detailed summaries, and in some cases transcripts, are normally made accessible to the public at the British Library. If requested, recordings can be closed for any time period up to 30 years to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

*Food and Culinary Culture* is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council involving a collaboration between the National Life Story Collection and The University of Sheffield.

If you would like any additional information, please contact Polly Russell tel: 020-7412-7460 or e-mail: Polly.Russell@bl.uk
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bell, D. (2002) ‘From writing at the kitchen table to TV dinners’ paper presented at Eat Drink and Be Merry: Cultural Meaning of Food in the 21st Century, June 3-5, 2002


259


May, J. (1996a) ‘A little taste of something more exotic’: the imaginative geographies of everyday life’, *Geography* 81 pp.57-64.


266


