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# **Campaigning Culinary Documentaries and the Responsibilization of Food Crises**

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## **Campaigning Culinary Documentaries and the Responsibilization of Food Crises**

**Abstract:** This paper explores the campaigning culinary documentary (CCD) as an emerging format within food television. CCDs bring together elements of the lifestyle genre with an explicit focus on a food 'crisis' -- such as obesity or animal welfare -- and explore how this crisis is to be resolved, usually through the intervention of a food celebrity. Focussing largely on shows made by the UK's Channel 4 network, we explore the ways in which CCDs narrate issues of responsabilization, whether these target consumers/viewers, the food industry, or the state. Through a reading of selected CCDs from Channel 4's roster, we consider how the shows attempt to fuse elements of lifestyle/reality TV with a social or political agenda, but one which deploys the governmental strategy of responsabilization and so could be read as an enactment of neoliberal logic. While there is some truth to this claim, our analysis and discussion seeks to complicate this reading, showing how CCDs open up other narrative and political possibilities while also consolidating the brand image of the cookery TV stars who front them.

**Key words:** food crisis; responsabilization; Channel 4 (UK); celebrity chef; food television; neoliberalism; governmentality

### **Highlights**

- Develops a critical discussion of the campaigning culinary documentary format (CCD)
- Provides detailed readings of selected British TV food programmes
- Locates the CCD genre in the context of neoliberalism and responsabilization
- Shows how food media narrates food crises and posits solutions

## 1. Introduction

The campaigning culinary documentary (CCD) offers a vehicle for television cookery stars to position themselves at the forefront of solving food ‘crises’, and to expand their brand (Bell and Hollows 2011). As such, CCDs are an important contemporary resource for imagining the politics of food and the relationships between consumers, the food industry and the state. Locating our discussion within debates about neoliberalism drawn from both media studies and geography, we examine how CCDs responsabilize different actors. While we highlight a familiar motif in which consumers are responsabilized for solving social and economic problems by changing their own behaviour, we also examine how some CCDs offer critiques of the food industry and question the role of government and the state in the management of food crises. These shows are thus an important space for airing views about food politics, and offer narratives of critique and of potential transformation. The object of this critique, the shape that transformation takes, and who is tasked with effecting it, are major concerns of our analysis.

Our discussion follows the story of selected CCDs first broadcast in the UK, tracking how the shows and their stars narrate crisis and solution – highlighting where ‘blame’ is shown to lie, and the role of the TV chef-celebrity as the ‘hero’ who alone is able to bring about change. CCDs may frame a narrative of democratic food politics and ‘people power’, but we argue that the co-option of such politics in brand building (whether by celebrities, politicians or corporations) is also on the agenda. While CCDs can be read as suggesting possibilities for doing food politics differently, then, we argue the need to critically analyse the framing of both ‘crisis’ and ‘solution’ in these programmes and in the wider discourses of which they are a part.

The discussion begins by defining the CCD as a genre and charting its development on British screens, using *Jamie’s School Dinners* as an exemplar, as well as defining key terms. We then outline our research methods. Following this, the paper explores three different forms of responsabilization mobilized in CCDs, targeting in turn the consumer, the food industry and the government. In these sections, we combine textual analysis with critical engagement with existing academic debate about neoliberalism, the ‘Big Society’, and moral entrepreneurship, as well as critically connecting to previous studies that have similarly explored how lifestyle and reality

TV utilize techniques of governmentality and responsabilization. We analyse a selection of shows from UK television network Channel 4, with much of our focus on the following: *Jamie's Ministry of Food* (fronted by Jamie Oliver, first broadcast 2008), *Hugh's Chicken Run* and its sequel, *Chickens... Hugh... and Tesco, Too* (both Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, aired 2008 and 2009), *Jimmy and the Giant Supermarket* (Jimmy Doherty, 2012) and *The People's Supermarket* (Arthur Potts Dawson, 2011). Taken together, our reading of these programmes highlights the particularities of the CCD as a key site in the construction and posited resolution of contemporary food crises.

## **2. The Campaigning Culinary Documentary**

The CCD has developed into a recognisable format on UK screens over the past decade. Although the shows are largely made by independent production companies, the CCD has offered a way of branding both a TV channel – the UK's Channel 4 (C4)<sup>i</sup> – and a series of food personalities closely identified with the channel. Below we identify some of the key narrative conventions of the CCD and explore the relationship between food personalities and 'ordinary people' depicted on screen (for more on the problematic category of 'ordinary people', see below). The CCD is a flexible format that has been adapted by other channels in the UK, taken up internationally (Gibson and Dempsey 2013; Rousseau 2012) and used as a framework for tackling a range of other social problems beyond food (Bonner 2011; McMurria 2008).

### **2.1 Saint Jamie**

*Jamie's Kitchen* (2002) established the potential of problem-solving documentary formats for managing the brand identities of TV chefs and TV channels. The series focused on Jamie Oliver's attempt to transform a group of unemployed young people into chefs to work in his new, charitable-status restaurant, Fifteen. *Jamie's Kitchen* enabled Oliver to move away from the recipe-and-lifestyle format through which he had established his television career, towards a more explicit public service role (Lewis 2008a). Broadcast soon after Oliver's move to C4, the series signalled how lifestyle experts had become increasingly central to the channel's brand identity (Barnes, this issue). By deploying Oliver beyond the lifestyle format, both chef and channel were associated with an emerging genre that combined 'foodtainment'

(Finkelstein 1999) with issues such as health, social exclusion and food ethics. This helped to establish Oliver as not just a lifestyle expert but also as a moral entrepreneur (Hollows and Jones 2010) and proved a useful formula for a commercial TV channel with a public service remit (Hobson 2008).

The blend of lifestyle and reality television with more ‘legitimate’ documentary formats was refined in the later four-part series *Jamie’s School Dinners* (2005), which offered a blueprint for the key characteristics of the CCD. First, *Jamie’s School Dinners* was set up in response to a perceived ‘crisis’ (substandard school meals) and centred around a crusading campaign to address this crisis (by seeking to transform practices in school kitchens and government policy on funding school lunches). Second, the crisis and the campaign provide a framework for a problem-solving narrative in which the food personality intervenes to overcome a series of obstacles and change food practices for the better. Third, *Jamie’s School Dinners* presents positive change as the result of a special and inspirational figure: Jamie is presented as the only person capable of effecting change, a viewpoint repeated in much approving commentary on the series (Hollows and Jones 2010). This makes the CCD an exceptional vehicle for a branding exercise, but also works to individualize the political imaginary surrounding social change, in terms of both celebrity interventions and more broadly by transferring responsibility to the individual and away from state initiatives – key tactics of responsabilization.

Fourth, these interventions frequently rely on makeovers of characters depicted as ‘ordinary people’, as well as makeovers of institutions or industries. The attempt to makeover ‘ordinary people’ provides much of the dramatic conflict – and arguably the entertainment – within the shows. The drama frequently centres on a male chef’s attempt to transform the practices of a working-class woman (see Hollows 2012): while *Jamie’s School Dinners* relies on the attempted conversion of an adversary into an ally in the figure of Nora the school dinner lady (Fox & Smith 2011), other characters who refuse to change can act as dramatic foils throughout the series. Lastly, *Jamie’s School Dinners*, like the CCDs that followed, shifted food programming and television food personalities away from their associations with lifestyle, presenting them as a vehicle for addressing wider social problems.

Nonetheless, the chef's professional expertise and role as cultural intermediary remain central to the format.

Jamie's forays into the CCD enabled him to trade on the celebrity produced by his investment in lifestyle. His image was recast as a more serious, a more 'national' and therefore, a more symbolically rich asset (Barnes, this issue; Hollows and Jones 2010). It also enabled C4, who had invested heavily in lifestyle programming (Brunsdon 2003), to gain some of those same rewards in terms of channel branding. This became evident in 'The Big Food Fight', an annual season of shows from 2008 to 2011, built around C4's roster of star chefs and using the CCD to anchor the season. As C4 acquired new food personalities, the CCD proved to be an adaptable formula, able to help articulate both the stars' and channel's identities. This was the case with Jimmy Doherty's<sup>ii</sup> Jimmy and the Giant Supermarket, discussed below, and other variants on the CCD. Channel 4 would also adapt the format to take on other non-culinary campaigns built around their lifestyle stars (such as *Jamie's Dream School* and retail-guru fronted *Mary's Bottom Line*), and the CCD has also been adopted by other broadcasters. Moreover, the format has also been used successfully in international contexts, not least in adaptations of series involving the same chefs (e.g. *Jamie's Kitchen Australia* which, like its UK predecessor, tackled youth unemployment via culinary training, and *Jamie's Food Revolution* which addressed school meals and obesity in the US).

## 2.2 Responsibilization, Governmentality, Neoliberalism

If CCDs identify a 'food crisis' that needs addressing, their narratives centre on the issue of who should take responsibility for solving the problem. While food personalities are shown to have the vision to identify the problem and the passion to address it, solutions ultimately rest on their ability to inspire and educate others to take responsibility for the problem. This is a central aspect of the process of responsabilization, which here we define as practices that work to encourage or coerce 'ordinary people' into taking responsibility for their own welfare and life chances. It also involves making people feel responsible for themselves, their families, and sometimes for socio-economic or ethical issues at other spatial scales. In short, we see responsabilization as a form of governmentality, a concept developed by Michel Foucault. Foucault elaborated on governmentality across much of his later work,

variously defining it as the ‘conduct of conduct’ or the ‘art of government’ – it is concerned with uncovering how governments produce citizens amenable to governing, and encourage those citizens to self-govern through the use of particular techniques of categorization and evaluation (for a geography-focused introduction, see Huxley 2008).

We use the term responsabilization here to summarize this imperative to self-govern as a responsible citizen, and the pedagogic processes through which the subject learns to self-govern (for fuller elaboration, see Rose et al 2006). Forms of expertise and expert knowledge are central to governmentality, as is a moral dimension to questions of who needs to be (and who can be) trained to be self-responsible. Today, we argue, food personalities deploy their expertise pedagogically, training their subjects – subjects constructed as ‘ignorant’ but amenable to ‘correction’ (Rich 2011). As Gibson and Dempsey (2013: 13) write in their analysis of *Jamie’s Food Revolution* in the US, the show attempts to change children’s eating practices ‘by adopting a moralizing discourse of children’s bodies as sites of poor education, bad parenting, and irresponsible food choices’ and locating change ‘at the scale of the self-regulating, individualized body.’ This aligns governmentality with various imperatives often labelled ‘neoliberal’, such as the privileging of market competition as the organizing principle for contemporary life and parallel attacks on ‘Big Government’.

Our understanding of neoliberalism corresponds closely to David Harvey’s assertion that it is

in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade . . . . It holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market (Harvey 2005: 2-3)

Implicit within this definition is the active, even aggressive withdrawal of the state from economic, social and cultural intervention, and to it we would add the significance of governmentality as the mechanism by which institutions and individuals come to conform to these market norms and, indeed, become the sites of their reproduction (Larner 2000).<sup>iii</sup> There has been considerable debate about the origins, definitions and applications of the concept of neoliberalism, including expansive commentary by human geographers looking for its spatial outworkings, mapping forms of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’, and reframing it as variegated and so in need of either pluralization (to ‘neoliberalisms’) or rethinking as process (neoliberalization) rather than predetermined outcome (for a summary, see Springer 2010). These debates are productive in that they ask us to think carefully about the very nature of neoliberalism and to be clear about the variant we are focused on. So, to be clear: we are interested in neoliberalism as governmentality, in its ‘intersections with subject formation’, as Springer (2010: 1025) puts it (and, like him, we acknowledge this is only one way of theorizing neoliberalism).

In this formulation, while neoliberalism represents an attack on statist forms of government, it replaces this with intensified forms of governance and governmentality – in short, with responsabilization. Lifestyle and reality TV genres are often singled out as key sites for the transmission of this neoliberal practice and for neoliberal subject formation (McMurria 2008; Ouellette and Hay 2008). While coherent and persuasive, the focus on these genres as vehicles for neoliberal governmentality ignores not only how such programming can provoke resistance (Hollows and Jones 2010; Warin 2011) but also how they can have the potential to identify other actors who might be held responsible. In this regard, because they must also involve narrative arcs that have come to define the genre, these programmes offer a more complicated, incomplete space through which to articulate neoliberal values – certainly less complete than the address of, say, health promotion campaigns or other ‘nudge’ strategies aiming to encourage behaviour change (Jones et al 2011), though even here there are questions about the reception of such messages and the take-up of their advice (Lindsay 2010).

### 2.3 A Note on Method

While recent developments in empirical work have made productive use of audience studies, sometimes combined with textual analysis in so-called 'text-in-action' approaches (Barnes, this issue; Piper 2013; Skeggs et al 2008), there remains a key role for text-based approaches in media analysis -- especially, perhaps, in geography, where social science methods tend to have more purchase. Of course, it is important to be mindful of the limitations of textual analysis -- that it cannot be used to understand reception and 'audiencing' (Piper 2013) -- but this does not make it redundant. As a method of analysing the framing of messages or discourses through attention to the different components of the media text (from narrative to visual style, from editing to voice-over or soundtrack), text-based research helps us see how media forms construct and circulate particular discourses. Combined with analysis of the media industries (in this case, the role of C4 as a commissioner and broadcaster of particular types of content), our paper explores the production of discourses about food crises, including how blame is apportioned, and what solutions are proffered. This should not, of course, be taken to assume that all viewers will receive/decode these messages straightforwardly: there are various 'reading positions' that audiences adopt, including those that actively resist the dominant messages projected at them from the screen (Hall 1980).

Our approach does not pretend to be comprehensive in its choice of text: rather, we purposively selected key programmes in order to develop an analysis guided by our concerns. The selected texts, chosen from the array of possible programmes and other food media, were subjected to close reading by all three authors, who then shared and discussed their own respective readings; key scenes as well as overarching narratives were identified; and the main discourses (and discursive strategies) -- at least as we saw them -- were highlighted. This reading was not mirrored by systematic audience research, although we did analyse social media commentary around our selected texts, as well as exploring aspects of the production context of each programme (including, for example, the career of its star and media coverage of the programme). We should note, finally, that we are also audience members for these programmes, even 'fans', so our reading is not the objective view of a disinterested researcher: it is in itself a form of partial audience self-analysis (albeit one informed by our particular subject locations). Our discussion now proceeds by identifying, from our close reading,

various frames of responsabilization that the selected programmes produce and narrate.

### **3. Responsibilizing Consumers**

‘Ordinary people’ acting as consumers are often identified as responsible for causing, contributing to and also solving the ‘crisis’ identified within the CCD. Alongside other critics who have explored Jamie Oliver’s CCDs (Barnes, this issue; Fox and Smith 2011; Gibson and Dempsey 2013; Rich 2011; Warin 2011), we locate our discussion in relation to wider debates which highlight how lifestyle and reality television formats have been used to naturalize neoliberal values and to draw distinctions between good and bad consumer-citizens (Couldry 2010; Ouellette and Hay 2008; Sender and Sullivan 2008; Silk and Francombe 2011). We also examine the extent to which these representative consumer figures are classed in particular ways (Biressi and Nunn 2013; Haywood and Yar 2006; Tyler 2008). We show how both the ‘successes’ and ‘failures’ of ‘ordinary people’ are ultimately used to affirm the food personality as a kind of superhero distinguished by their exceptional degree of responsibility, passion and caring<sup>iv</sup>.

#### *3.1 Saint Jamie’s Second Coming*

*Jamie’s Ministry of Food* focused primarily on consumption practices as both the cause of and solution to the ‘obesity crisis’. While the government is seen as having a role to play (see below), it is the activities of consumers rather than the food industry that are presented as the cause of the ‘epidemic’. The series mirrored wider changes in representations of working-class consumption which no longer focus on the ‘inability to consume’ but on consumption practices identified as ‘aesthetically impoverished’ (Hayward and Yar 2006: 14). The ‘crisis’ is visualized in *Jamie’s Ministry of Food* through the representative figure of Natasha Whiteman, a single parent living on welfare benefits whose ‘improper’ consumption of food (her children are shown sitting on the floor eating takeaway kebabs – presumably made from processed doner meat -- from Styrofoam containers) is linked not to economic poverty but ‘improper consumption’ more generally (the children sit in a room dominated by a large wide-screen TV). The portrait of Natasha as a ‘bad’ subject was not lost on viewers, who commented on blogs about the relationship between her poor consumption choices and her moral shortcomings (Hollows and Jones 2010; Piper 2013).

*Jamie's Ministry of Food* focuses on the ways in which fractions of the working class make poor consumer choices because -- in their tastes for takeaways, convenience food and confectionery -- they demonstrate a lack of cultural capital and the culinary skills needed to become 'good' consumers. If making class differences legible is a source of potential entertainment in the CCD (Piper 2013), representations of 'bad' working-class consumers also contribute to a wider process through which social class and moral value are realigned (Skeggs 2005). The show's pedagogic address focuses on personal responsibility, 'diagnosing and rehabilitating cases of 'ignorance' and self-neglect, and allowing the television viewer at home to identify as normal in comparison' (Ouellette and Hay 2008: 476).

In the case of *Jamie's Ministry of Food*, this enabled Oliver to trade on moral concern as a form of capital (Hollows and Jones 2010) and to legitimate the need for more Jamie Oliver product to 'educate' the public. It is therefore unsurprising that in the pre-publicity for Oliver's 2013 series *Jamie's Money Saving Meals*, he resurrected images from *Jamie's Ministry of Food* in a magazine interview: 'I'm not judgmental, but I've spent a lot of time in poor communities, and I find it quite hard to talk about modern-day poverty. You might remember that scene.... with the mum and the kid eating chips and cheese out of Styrofoam containers, and behind them is a massive fucking TV. It just didn't weigh up' (Deans 2013). This works to suggest that working-class people are in some ways fated to live poor lives because of poor choices and that, in terms of Oliver's trajectory as a moral entrepreneur, more television cookery programmes are the solution to 'modern-day poverty'. Here, economic capital, cultural capital and moral worth are all interwoven around the scene of 'aesthetically impoverished' domestic food consumption.

### 3.2 Ethical Makeovers

The relationships between economic capital, cultural capital and morality also feature in CCDs concerned with ethical consumption. While *Hugh's Chicken Run* (focusing on poultry welfare), *The People's Supermarket* ('fair' and sustainable food) and *Jimmy and the Giant Supermarket* (animal welfare) hold the food industry to be responsible for the ethical crisis at the centre of their respective CCDs (see below), consumers are represented as partly culpable, and responsabilized consumers are

shown to be integral to solving the problem. Nonetheless, in contrast to *Jamie's Ministry of Food*, consumers' responsibility is treated more sympathetically in these shows -- especially consumers on limited budgets.

How these CCDs frame consumers varies. *Hugh's Chicken Run* takes place on a working-class estate and attempts to transform its residents from 'unethical' into 'ethical' consumers. In this makeover process, the residents are introduced to the joys of raising their own chickens and subjected to the reality of battery farming. While TV cook Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall does attempt to transform the supermarket giant Tesco's practices in relation to chicken production, the series climaxes in a 'free-range week' in which local residents are asked to buy only free-range chickens. By emphasizing consumers' ability to make a change through their purchasing power, the show demonstrates how consumption can be a form of citizenship (Littler 2009). The series presents 'green modes of living... as middle-class virtues to which we should all aspire', offering the residents who submit to being made over an identification with 'ethical modes of distinction' which 'are increasingly associated with social distinction' (Lewis 2008b: 238).

In the process, the show sets up distinctions between what it positions as 'ethical' and 'unethical' consumers, with the latter associated with Hayley, a working-class mum who remains resistant to change. Refusing to demonstrate the 'correct' emotional dispositions when shown the production methods used in intensive farming, Hayley instead reiterates that she is a single mum whose primary ethical responsibility is to budget wisely in order to care for her family (Bell and Hollows 2011). Here the responsibilities associated with modes of ethical consumption conflict with the everyday ethics governing thrift-oriented consumption (Barnett et al 2013), leaving Hayley positioned as an 'unethical' consumer. Indeed, Hayley recognizes this positioning when she is caught by Hugh buying 'cheap' chicken during free-range week and states 'Don't look at me like that ... this is all I can afford at the moment'. This causes Hugh to temporarily reflect on the limits of ethical consumption: 'Back to reality. Mums like Hayley, tough budgets, kids to feed, two [chickens] for a fiver, what are you going to do?' Although this reality is quickly forgotten as the show celebrates those with more ethical practices (and Hugh's successes), it nonetheless challenges Powell and Prasad's (2010) claims that lifestyle programmes simply

disavow the extent to which social inequalities limit our abilities to makeover the self. Whether people can ‘afford to care’ also operates as the starting point for Jimmy Doherty’s quest to get Tesco to produce affordable free-range food in Jimmy and the Giant Supermarket, analysed later. As Doherty puts it, those with financial constraints ‘feel they’re left out of it, they’re not part of the club: I’d love those guys to be buying into that free-range element’.

### 3.3 Supermarket Hero

Food retail is the focus of *The People’s Supermarket*, starring the relatively unknown TV personality Arthur Potts Dawson, a restaurant chef with an interest in sustainability and food waste. Potts Dawson sets out to ‘change the way Britain shops for food’ and to challenge the control major supermarket chains exert over food producers, over people’s ability to forge a sense of community in contemporary urban spaces, and over food consumers. The series thus frames its crisis as the dangers – to producers, consumers and the environment -- of the domination of the food chain in the UK by a small number of powerful supermarkets. Claiming to offer ‘people power’, the series follows Potts Dawson’s attempt to establish a co-operative run by and for ‘local’ people. Focusing on an attempt to produce an economically viable and more ethically responsible alternative to the major supermarket chains, a key motivation within the series is how to make supermarket consumers, wedded to cost-cutting and convenience, into People’s Supermarket members and shoppers.

Much of the drama centres on class conflict between those members. Unlike *Jamie’s Ministry of Food* and *Hugh’s Chicken Run*, *The People’s Supermarket* is located in a mixed class neighbourhood marked by high property prices but with remaining social housing stock. Class conflicts come to a head over two key issues as the supermarket develops: the price of its goods and the type of produce that is stocked. A concern for many of ‘the people’ is that they cannot afford to shop at the People’s Supermarket: Arthur lack the buying power of the major retailers, which forces up prices, and this is exacerbated by his commitment to stocking the shop based on ethical principles such as local sourcing, sustainability, ‘quality’ and ‘healthy’ choices. Like Hayley in *Hugh’s Chicken Run*, a number of working-class residents view this ethical premium as too high because it works against the ‘ordinarily ethical’ dispositions involved in caring for a family on a tight budget (Barnett et al 2005).

Class differences in cultural capital and consequent food tastes overlay these economic inequalities (Bourdieu 1984; Johnston and Baumann 2011) and this provides a key source of dramatic conflict, as is so often the case in lifestyle and makeover TV. In to-camera pieces prior to a members' meeting in episode two, those members positioned as middle class praise the 'wonderful artichokes and gooseberries' while lamenting that the stock of fizzy drinks 'looks a bit Tesco'. Working-class members, by contrast, complain that there is too much organic produce and no fish fingers. The formal meeting brings out similar antagonisms. Middle-class members complain about the food miles travelled by Peruvian asparagus and demand 'big Italian olive oil bread'. When working-class Josie asks whether Arthur would consider stocking frozen chips (fries), another member asks 'why can't you make them out of potatoes?' to which Arthur responds 'some people can't, I'm afraid'. While questions about time poverty are side-stepped, the meeting comes to an uneasy resolution following an intervention from a middle-class member who admits he can't afford organic food. The voiceover suggests that 'ordinary people', their economic constraints and their 'simple' tastes, will now be taken into account, transforming stock: 'Arthur had to admit that he was wrong to concentrate on high-end produce'.

Unlike *Jamie's Ministry of Food*, *The People's Supermarket* gives more space for a variety of voices to be heard and (at least partially) legitimated. Nonetheless, while the series opens up a position from which to mock the pretentious choices of the middle classes, it is still the middle-class co-op members who can generate a sense of distinction that arises from the 'performative practice associated with being an ethical consumer' (Barnett et al 2005: 41), while the working-class members have less scope to generate profit from their complaints that they can't get 'plain basic stuff'. Although in a later scene Arthur sits down with Josie and makes it clear that he needs to learn from members like her, this is undercut when, in a to-camera piece, he repeatedly describes Josie and her stance as 'difficult'. Therefore, while Josie's consumption practices are rendered meaningful, the show reinforces middle-class values as 'normal, good and appropriate.... functioning to mark the proper and its limits' (Skeggs et al no date: 1).

By setting up food personalities in terms of their passion and willingness to tackle a problem that no-one else is seemingly addressing, consumers are tasked with the responsibility for solving food crises after the cameras (and celebs) have gone. Although these shows differ in the extent to which consumers are responsabilized, they portray ‘good’ consumers as ‘active citizens’ and ‘ethical consumers’ (Couldry 2008; Goodman 2010). In this way, our argument so far supports other studies of both Jamie Oliver’s CCDs and reality television more generally which draw on Foucault to highlight how these shows promote neoliberal forms of governmentality -- as discussed earlier, where we also noted our interest in going beyond readings that simply equate CCD with responsabilization and neoliberalism. In particular, we flagged how these shows open up space for resistance, and that they have the potential to identify other actors responsible for food crises. We now turn to a consideration of the extent to which this potential is realized.

#### **4. Responsibilizing the Food Industry**

CCDs do not only responsabilize consumers; food producers – especially intensive agribusiness and supermarkets -- are also targeted as emblems of systemic problems. Using food media to highlight problems and anxieties, to mobilize viewer-consumer ethics and as a medium for ‘food pedagogies’ is not new (Flowers and Swan 2011). Freidberg (2004), for example, outlines how ‘commodity-chain exposés’ have been used on UK television since the mid-1990s, compelling producers and retailers to address ethical issues as much to protect their brand image as to act ‘responsibly’. While ‘the political economies of oligopolistic media production and food retailing appear highly unfavourable for the development of an energetic, critical movement around ‘ethical’ food sourcing’, Freidberg (2004: 518) argues, ‘this has in fact happened in Britain’ – and CCDs sometimes continue this lineage, emerging as a platform for some television chefs to engage with food politics. While there are clearly close entanglements between some of these TV chefs and the food industry (Jamie Oliver fronting adverts for Sainsbury’s supermarket and embracing more relaxed broadcasting rules on product placement in his recipe format shows), here we explore the extent to which the CCD has represented the food industry as responsible for producing and solving food crises or, alternatively, offered food companies an opportunity to ‘manage’ their brand identities and reputations.

#### 4.1 Tesco Makeover

Jimmy and the Giant Supermarket featured TV food personality Jimmy Doherty attempting to persuade Tesco to produce higher welfare versions of selected products at affordable prices. With Compassion in World Farming acting as an adviser, the series appeared to be premised on an adversarial relationship between Jimmy and Tesco. However, while the voiceover in the pre-title sequence talks about ‘challenging’ the supermarket as Jimmy enters ‘the belly of the beast’, Tesco’s management present their relationship with Jimmy in terms of a partnership (‘it’s a great challenge we’d like to be part of’). Nevertheless, Jimmy and the Giant Supermarket represents the food industry as responsible for enabling ‘ordinary’ consumers to ‘afford to care’: if consumers are to be responsabilized, industry must play a role in that process.

While Jimmy and the Giant Supermarket offered the opportunity for some of Doherty’s compassion and animal welfare credentials to rub off on Tesco’s brand image, the series also opened up space to publicize animal welfare issues in food production. For example, viewers witness the slaughter of day-old male dairy calves because there is no market for veal in Britain. While the dairy industry and ill-informed consumers are largely blamed for this situation, questions are also raised about Tesco’s power over the food chain and farmers’ economic fates. However, Tesco’s message throughout the series positions the supermarket as a public servant, entirely responsive to its consumers: in the show, they present their ‘consumer panel’ as sovereign, and in publicity around the series reiterated that ‘it’s you, not us, who decides what makes it onto our shelves’ ([realfood.tesco.com/our-food/higher-welfare-meat.html](http://realfood.tesco.com/our-food/higher-welfare-meat.html)). Therefore, Tesco not only uses the series to foreground its new higher welfare products but also consistently aligns itself with the values of Jimmy’s campaign in order to promote its corporate social responsibility and ‘greenwash’ its image. Rather than suggest that the food industry needs increased regulation to meet higher animal welfare standards, retail’s ability to self-regulate is represented as dependent on consumers’ willingness to take responsibility.

It is unsurprising that Tesco sought to harness the power of the CCD to meet their own needs, because the supermarket had been the critical focus for *Chickens...*

*Hugh... and Tesco Too*, Fearnley-Whittingstall's follow-up to *Hugh's Chicken Run*. Largely abandoning his previous campaign which championed free-range chicken, this programme focused on the 'qualitative difference' between the conditions of chickens raised under the 'Freedom Foods'<sup>v</sup> intensive farming system and the 'standard system'. Hugh's mission becomes to get Tesco to upgrade its basic chicken to meet Freedom Foods standards and to 'close the gap' between corporate policy on welfare and actual practices. Other supermarket chains are shown to be improving the welfare standards of their chickens and/or their labelling practices, and it is Tesco, not corporate food retailers in general, who are represented as 'the problem' demanding a makeover. Hugh marshals the interests of chickens (who need higher welfare lives), consumers (who need to be able to make informed choices), the poultry industry (the 'poultry price war' between supermarkets is putting 'farmers out of business') and animal welfare organizations against Tesco, represented here as an obstructive, bullying and faceless corporate power which misleads customers.

In the process, the show highlights how corporate practices do not necessarily meet their publicized responsibility statements, and simply act as 'a form of reputation management in the face of criticism' (Littler 2009: 61): an 'onslaught of corporate welfare-wash', Hugh calls it. The programme demonstrates everyone taking responsibility (even Hayley from *Hugh's Chicken Run*, who switches to Freedom Foods chicken) -- except Tesco. Indeed, Tesco's response to Hugh's purchase of a Tesco share to enable him to table a resolution on animal welfare at its AGM, is to present him with a bill for over £86000 to cover postage costs for sending out the resolution to shareholders. While Tesco is represented as bullying, everyone else continues to take responsibility -- the postage costs are covered in 24 hours, partly out of Hugh's own pocket and partly through individual donations to a fundraising website set up by Compassion in World Farming.

If compassion is now a tradable celebrity asset (Goodman 2013), *Chickens... Hugh... and Tesco Too* (like *Hugh's Chicken Run* before it and his later *Fish Fight* shows) works to brand Fearnley-Whittingstall through his capacity to care about animal (and consumer) welfare, and positions him as a cultural intermediary and moral entrepreneur – his role is both to democratize ideas about lifestyle and to frame particular situations as moral problems that warrant both attention and action.

However, unlike CCDs such as *Jamie's Ministry of Food*, the show acknowledges that there are other activist groups and NGOs – and, to a lesser extent, ‘ordinary’ consumers -- involved in the fight. While the programme never calls for government intervention, and depends instead on a model in which supermarkets must choose to sign up to regulations on welfare standards, Tesco's level of resistance to Hugh's campaign also suggests the limits of self-regulation. Major shareholders are shown to be only interested in profit and only interested in taking (corporate) responsibility for animal welfare when there is a risk to their brand. Ethical behaviour by supermarkets is therefore shown to be an exercise in reputation management rather than responsabilization. This questions the extent to which CCDs are always simply expressions of neoliberal logic. Furthermore, while *Chickens... Hugh... and Tesco* Too responsabilizes consumers to act ethically in relation to chicken welfare, its underlying logic also suggests that responsible consumers might choose not to shop at Tesco. While this might do little to disturb the market logic of neoliberalism, it can be understood as part of a model of consumer activism which has a long history (Hilton 2003) and which uses consumption practices to express broader ethical dispositions.

#### 4.2 Beyond Tesco

Other CCDs have shed critical light on food retailing. Rather than responsabilize supermarkets to become more ethical, *The People's Supermarket* aimed to provide an alternative to them, using a social enterprise model of food retailing. This rested on notions of ‘fair trade’ – in which neither producers nor consumers are exploited – that recalled earlier waves of consumer activism (Hilton 2003). In line with Potts Dawson's established image as a chef concerned with sustainability, the series also highlighted supermarkets' irresponsible practices in relation to food waste at different points in the food chain (illustrated through examples such as a fundraising dinner concocted out of food from supermarket bins and the sourcing of ‘supermarket reject’ fruit and veg).

Although as we identified earlier, the series was problematic in its representation of the co-op members as consumers, by working ‘in and against’ the food retail system (and ‘beyond’ the big supermarkets), *The People's Supermarket* encouraged viewers to envisage alternative or ‘diverse’ economies (Gibson-Graham 2008; Goodman et al 2010). As with other experiments in collective and co-operative provisioning, *The*

*People's Supermarket* opens up the idea that changing people's relationship to food shopping can lead to change elsewhere – not just along the commodity chain, but in society at large (Belasco 2007; Little et al 2010). The People's Supermarket characterized itself as 'a commercially sustainable, social enterprise that achieves its growth and targets whilst operating within values based on community development and cohesion' (The Decorators 2013: 43). While its commitment to community and localism might operate as progressive values against the globalizing corporate power of supermarkets, these values would also be appropriated and deployed in different ways by politicians (Williams et al 2014).

## **5. Responsibilizing Government**

While notions of responsabilization play out in CCDs in relation to consumers and the food industry, celebrity food campaigners have also attempted to responsabilize government and the state. CCDs deploy varying understandings of the relationship between food issues, government and the state; we argue that while CCDs share some common ground with the predominantly neoliberal discourse of the 'Big Society', fashioned as the centrepiece of the British coalition government's social policy and moral purpose, they also contain competing and conflicting notions of community and locality. With a rhetoric of community empowerment, the Big Society is often seen as little more than a cloaking device for further neoliberal 'rolling back' of the state (Lister 2014) – its very name is in opposition to 'Big Government', and its proposed forms of volunteerism, localism and social enterprise might be read as 'replacing' the (welfare) state. As we go on to show, insofar as CCDs share a common approach with Big Society, it lies in the central role they give to the chef as entrepreneur, rather than in some straightforward anti-statism. The moral authority and conspicuous activism of the campaigning celebrity moreover reveals some of the problems in constructing a democratic food politics within the CCD.<sup>vi</sup>

Central to all neoliberal projects, and certainly to the Big Society variant, is the imperative to open up public services to market competition and to shrink what is regularly portrayed as a parasitic and unresponsive state dominated by vested interests. In terms of food, the state acts as a provider, often through intermediaries, to dependent groups including schoolchildren, hospital in-patients and prisoners; as a regulator (including the regulation of market competition in agribusiness and food

retailing); and as an educator in defining the acceptable and permissible forms of the national diet. While generally avoiding much interrogation of the state's function as an enabler of global food capitalism, the CCD has tackled all of these state roles, in a way that sometimes speaks the language of neoliberalism. *Gordon Behind Bars* (2012), for example, had chef Gordon Ramsay set up a bakery in prison since, according to the show's publicity, he 'thinks it's time Britain's prisoners paid their way. There are 88,000 prisoners in the UK and it costs the taxpayer £38,000 to keep each of them locked up for a year'.<sup>vii</sup>

### 5.1 Feeding the Big Society

The most overtly critical position on the state's role in a range of food issues came in *Jamie's Ministry of Food*. Although the series celebrated the achievements of the wartime British state, and appropriated its aesthetic in various ways, Jamie's comments both in front of camera and in interview painted a negative picture of the twenty-first century state. He bemoaned the lack of standards among local government personnel, undercut the programme's claim that 'Britain needs a new [state] Ministry of Food' ('Ask Bradford [people] if they want a government ministry of food or a Jamie's ministry of food, they'll say Jamie's'; Cooke 2008: 53); and advocated a 'people power' solution to the 'problem' of the state ('They don't run us, we run the government... Bring it on').

*Jamie's Ministry of Food* was broadcast well before the 2010 UK general election, but its populist anti-statism, together with its representations of 'dysfunctional' working-class life, resonated with the developing themes of resurgent Conservatism. In particular, the series chimed with the language of 'Broken Britain' used extensively by David Cameron and the right-wing tabloid press from 2007 onwards (Slater 2014), and the Big Society that the Conservative election manifesto promised would heal such damage. As Bramall (2013: 91) remarks of *Jamie's Ministry of Food*, rather than recuperating or reinvigorating a 'big' state response to food problems, 'the solution to the crisis lies elsewhere' -- in the entrepreneurial energy manifested by Jamie and perhaps in a new politics prepared to make 'other arrangements'.

Nonetheless, the fact that Jamie couches his campaign in the rhetoric of Cameronite Conservatism does not indicate a straightforwardly neoliberal position, for at least

three reasons. First, to argue in this way ignores both Jamie's earlier interventions in food crises (which sought to reform rather than dismantle state school meals) and the different strands that constitute the Big Society idea. As Corbett and Walker (2013) note, while the main driver of Big Society rhetoric is undoubtedly the neoliberal desire to remove any residual pockets of the post-1945 settlement (wherein the modern welfare state was forged, based on experiences of wartime austerity but also of common endeavour; on the connection between postwar austerity and the contemporary UK foodscape, see Potter and Westall 2013), it has also been fed by traditions of 'libertarian paternalism' and Conservative communitarianism commonly dubbed 'Red Toryism'. This latter strand of Conservative thinking, while deeply anti-statist, also argues 'that the economic neo-liberalism unleashed by the New Right in the 1980s contributed to the destruction of communities by endorsing an extreme individualism, [which] undermined and destroyed the very associative traditions that are the only protection against the state' (Corbett and Walker 2013: 457). CCDs regularly hinge on the romantic attempt to recreate or invent such associative food traditions. *Jamie's Ministry of Food* characterises its Pass It On campaign as a 'modern-day version of the way people used to pass recipes down through the generations', while *The People's Supermarket* quotes a local shopper reminiscing that 'years ago it was all little shops ... it was communal and it's not any more'. Similarly, a number of CCDs represent the anonymous and distant relations between food growers and food retailers as a problem: ensuring 'good' food knowledge for the customer, and frequently a lower price, involves a cook or retailer establishing face-to-face relations with a farmer.

Second, the chef-celebrity has at times been constructed as a 'busybody' meddling in the state's business. Jamie's ambivalence (even contradictoriness) about the role of the state as a food regulator was established well before *Jamie's Ministry of Food*. Talking to a group of Lincolnshire parents in *Jamie's Return to School Dinners* (2006), Jamie observes 'God bless the government but I don't believe they are passionate [about school food]... people can make everything work'. Yet when engaging with Secretary of State for Education Alan Johnson about children's junk food consumption in school, Jamie professes himself 'all up for a government that are a little bit nanny state when they need to be'. It was this nannyishness that was targeted by then Conservative Health Secretary Andrew Lansley, who withdrew a

New Labour plan to offer free school meals to the children of low-income families and suggested that ‘constantly lecturing people and trying to tell them what to do ... undermine[s] ... the results that we achieve’ (Triggle 2010). Lansley’s subsequent apology suggested that Jamie occupied a more prominent position within popular debate about food policymaking than the government minister.

A final objection is that although the programmes may attempt to obscure the role of the state, state funding is an issue whenever the CCD project needs to be sustained beyond the period of filming. Indeed the narratives frequently build towards an encounter with a high-ranking politician, with (hope of) the disbursement of funds providing narrative resolution: in *Gordon Behind Bars* the chef meets with Justice Secretary Ken Clarke to discuss funding the project; in *Jamie’s Ministry of Food* Jamie’s plans to roll out the scheme are dependent upon local authority finance; and in *The People’s Supermarket* the appearance of Prime Minister David Cameron, using the shop as launch pad for a proposed Big Society Bank, becomes an opportunity for Potts Dawson to solicit funds. While Potts Dawson would later react uneasily to *The People’s Supermarket’s* potential co-option as a Big Society model, distancing himself from any association with the Coalition government, he also spies a way to combine political publicity with C4’s spotlight, asking the PM for funding.

## 5.2 Arthur and David, Jamie and Tony

The appearance of Cameron on *The People’s Supermarket* suggests that, rather than these CCDs reflecting changes taking place in the political field, they represent parallel and co-constitutive exercises in branding. Just as we have seen chefs brand themselves as food campaigners, C4 repositioning their brand around the CCD, and big food retailers attempting (with varying degrees of success) to rebrand themselves through their association with culinary campaigns, so too politicians have sought to associate their brand with the CCD. Boyle and Kelly (2012) suggest that politicians have made use of business celebrities who they believe connect better with the public than themselves; this use of food personalities offers similar opportunities. While porosity between the spheres of food celebrity and politics had been established in 2001 with the appointment of the BBC’s former *Masterchef* presenter, Lloyd Grossman, as the NHS’s ‘food tsar’, the template for such cross-branding was again established by *Jamie’s School Dinners* and its successor *Jamie’s Return to School*

Dinners. Both involve encounters with various tiers of the UK government, building from meetings with representatives of local authorities to high-level discussions with government ministers and finally, triumphantly, to a meeting with then Prime Minister Tony Blair in the garden of Downing Street. As Jamie basks in the glow of political acknowledgement, Blair also profits from the publicity accruing from aligning himself with a rather different power elite. Potter and Westall (2013) suggest that popular participation in food practices is often reworked by private capital as forms of ‘enclosure’ and this resonates with the appearances of both Blair and Cameron in CCDs: the garden and the small-is-beautiful supermarket allow an enclosure within which all concerned attempt to capitalize on their capital through the association with a leader in another field.

Nonetheless, such enclosure can be difficult to manage: the attempted public relations coup can run into difficulties, not least when the narrative conventions of the CCD demand conflict and tension, and also need to provide a heroic role for their central celebrity. Taking on the government, like taking on a supermarket giant, provides exactly the storyline that the CCD needs, and can undermine any previously or potentially cosy relationship. While Jamie’s appearance in Blair’s garden might have been mutually reinforcing as a moment of co-validation, Cameron’s appearance in the People’s Supermarket was less assured. It is unsurprising that Cameron would cast around for exemplars of his Big Society vision, and would think he had found one readily to hand in The People’s Supermarket. But in the life of the store beyond the C4 series, the PM’s visit is commented on relentlessly. When the shop faced a court case over an unpaid rates bill in 2011, this was depicted as an example of the failings of the Big Society idea.<sup>viii</sup> The leverage of the PM’s visit, repeated in later media coverage, serves as a reminder that celebrities can get better mileage out of such encounters than politicians.

CCDs undoubtedly speak in a language reminiscent of neoliberalism: the private sector is represented as sufficiently light-footed to achieve change, the state can have too many tiers of bureaucracy, and the entrepreneur is a cultural hero who embodies the necessary passion and contacts to get things done. But none of these themes are reducible to neoliberalism. While they all operate according to market logic, none of them are centrally concerned (or even concerned at all) with shrinking the state. What

is perhaps of greater concern is the CCD's emphasis on celebrity and entrepreneurship as solutions to social problems. In a discussion of entrepreneurial philanthropy which shares ground with our argument, Maclean et al (2013: 758) note that 'philanthropy is hugely undemocratic. It is undemocratic not only through the huge disparities of wealth of those involved, but because entrepreneurial philanthropists understandably wish to retain a measure of control over the projects they sponsor'. Though, as we have seen, the celebrity chef-entrepreneur is subjected to repeated challenges from 'ordinary people', these are treated as opportunities for reflection and refinement, and add watchable conflict to the unfolding drama. For Corbett and Walker (2013), the Big Society is a hegemonic formation that binds together competing and contradictory Conservative positions in an overall neoliberal trajectory. But they argue that even the most communitarian model posited within the Big Society discourse imagines a hierarchical society of 'attached unequals'. While we reject the idea that even those CCDs that are most ambivalent about the state can be straightforwardly aligned with neoliberalism, the CCD's model of change within food systems and food politics, dependent as it is upon the heroic figure of the television chef-entrepreneur, is a matter of 'attached inequality'.

## **6. Conclusion**

CCDs fuse elements from lifestyle and reality TV with a political and/or social agenda, offering a critique of current food practices, policies and politics. The ways in which consumers are responsabilized within CCDs – to cook their way out of obesity or poverty, or to shop their way to improved chicken welfare – reaffirms wider arguments about how lifestyle and reality TV naturalize neoliberal values by transforming consumption into a form of citizenship. While some CCDs promote forms of activism in relation to progressive causes (particularly animal welfare and 'fairer' trade), there is an uneven distribution of the cultural and economic resources required by these practices (Barnett et al 2005). Furthermore, despite in some cases imagining alternatives to contemporary relations of production (most notably in the case of *The People's Supermarket*), structural explanations of food 'crises' – and structural solutions – are often absent, or limited to specific targets. So, while *Chickens... Hugh .... And Tesco too* might highlight the power of supermarket chains over both producers and consumers -- and the relationships between supermarket

profits and animal welfare – it does so by vilifying Tesco, largely absolving all other supermarket chains (or the entire capitalist industrial food system) of blame.

However, the CCD cannot simply be understood as the straightforward working-out of neoliberal logic. As we have shown, while public bureaucracy is frequently represented as stifling much needed change, CCDs do not advocate shrinking the state. Instead they use entrepreneurial food personalities to responsabilize the state for solving aspects of ‘food crises’. In the repeated narrative arc which leads the crusading television chef to a meeting with a senior political figure, the government is positioned as an always potentially responsabilized agent which, like consumers, can be subjected to the pedagogy of cultural intermediaries and made amenable to ‘correction’. The political implications of the CCD therefore largely lie in these celebrities’ positioning as entrepreneurs and ‘permanent persuaders’. CCDs portray food personalities’ willingness to ‘do something’, to imagine and deliver entrepreneurial solutions and to individually make change happen. This suggests that the real beneficiaries of the campaigns to address ‘food crises’ are the food personalities themselves, as they add value and an increasing moral authority to their brand.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Channel 4 is a UK broadcaster which began transmission in 1982. Although it is a commercially-funded network, it has a public service remit requiring it to demonstrate innovation and creativity, to include 'programmes of an educational nature' and to provide programming for minority groups (Communications Act, 2003). The network's association with food-lifestyle

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programming can most clearly be seen from 1999 onwards, with the broadcasting in that year of *Escape to River Cottage* and *Nigella Bites*.

<sup>ii</sup> While some of the celebrity chefs and lifestyle intermediaries in this article have an international profile, others may be unfamiliar to readers outside the UK. Jimmy Doherty, for example, is a Suffolk farmer who, like many of the celebrities mentioned here, achieved his television breakthrough on the BBC (in the series *Jimmy's Farm*, 2002). He is also a good friend of Jamie Oliver; the two have appeared together in programmes for both BBC and Channel 4.

<sup>iii</sup> For a useful discussion of neoliberalism in the context of discourses framing a recent UK food crisis, see Abbots and Coles 2013; on neoliberalism and the current UK foodscape, see Potter and Westall 2013.

<sup>iv</sup> While chef-as-superhero may seem far-fetched, press coverage of *The People's Supermarket* featured Arthur Potts Dawson in a Superman outfit (Mount 2011).

<sup>v</sup> Freedom Food is a food assurance scheme that is monitored by animal welfare charity the RSPCA. It lays down a series of welfare standards that exceed the legal minimum but do not require animals to be free range. In what is referred to as the 'standard system', there is no requirement to provide chickens with natural light and there are cramped conditions.

<sup>vi</sup> Williams, Goodwin & Cloke (2014) highlight forms of entrepreneurial subject at the heart of Big Society; like us, they are wary of simply seeing localism and Big Society as anti-statist or narrowly neoliberal.

<sup>vii</sup> [www.channel4.com/programmes/gordon-behind-bars/episode-guide](http://www.channel4.com/programmes/gordon-behind-bars/episode-guide)

<sup>viii</sup> [www.standard.co.uk/news/crippling-rates-hit-big-society-plans-says-boss-of-peoples-store-6579023.html](http://www.standard.co.uk/news/crippling-rates-hit-big-society-plans-says-boss-of-peoples-store-6579023.html)