

CONTEMPORARY  
FOOD STUDIES

# Celebrity Chefs, Food Media and the Politics of Eating

Joanne Hollows



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**CELEBRITY CHEFS, FOOD MEDIA AND  
THE POLITICS OF EATING**

Contemporary Food Studies: Economy, Culture and Politics

Series Editors: David Goodman and Michael K. Goodman

ISSN: 2058-1807

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# **CELEBRITY CHEFS, FOOD MEDIA AND THE POLITICS OF EATING**

**Joanne Hollows**

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Bloomsbury Publishing Plc  
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK  
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA  
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

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First published in Great Britain 2022

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022932158

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3501-4572-6  
ePDF: 978-1-3501-4570-2  
eBook: 978-1-3501-4569-6

Series: Contemporary Food Studies: Economy, Culture and Politics

Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

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*For my mum and dad who raised me in the Church of Delia Smith.*



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the help of a lot of people, this book would never have got off the ground or been completed. It would also have been a lot worse. Lots of people shared ideas, tips and papers during the course of writing. With apologies to anyone I've forgotten, these include Karen Davis, Lorenzo Domaneschi, Kevin Geddes, Tania Lewis, Jess Martin, Michelle Phillipov, Alexandra Rodney, Estella Tincknell, Karen Throsby, Ana Tominc and Karen Wilkes.

Some people went above and beyond by giving up their scarce time and mental space during a pandemic to read through and give me generous and invaluable feedback on the book. Huge thanks to Jonatan Leer, Nick Piper, Elaine Swan and Ben Taylor and even bigger thanks to David Bell and Mark Jancovich who waded through the entire book. I wasn't up to answering all the issues you raised but I did my best and you've all hugely improved this book.

I would never have got my act together to write this book without the encouragement of Mike Goodman. I am grateful to both Mike and David Goodman for inviting me into their series, the helpful feedback on the proposal and the general sense of cheer, enthusiasm and positivity. I'm also grateful to the two anonymous readers who gave engaged and generous advice which I really valued. Thanks also to Miriam Cantwell at Bloomsbury for initially supporting the project and to Lily McMahon who was very, very patient with me when it was late and offered continued support.

This book would also never have existed without earlier collaborative research with Steve Jones and David Bell and I am incredibly grateful to both of them. Some of the chapters in the book draw on this collective work, particularly on campaigning culinary documentaries and culinary travelogues (Chapters 5, 6 and 7). However, both have contributed so much more by sharing ideas, arguments and resources that allowed me to think about things in ways I would never have done otherwise – and by enabling my addiction to Jamie Oliver's ever-evolving career. Steve's seemingly encyclopaedic knowledge of *Guardian* articles and political commentators was also invaluable in many places in this book.

Finally, thanks to Mark Jancovich for living with me through the lockdowns. I am sure I haven't been the easiest person to live with. I know I should have doomscrolled less and I may have asked you to check my temperature a few too many times! I can't imagine being cooped up for over a year with anyone else. An enormous thanks for the very *very* many kinds of support; the repetitive late afternoon walks round 1970s housing estates and to visit the emu; and the endless evenings spent watching Australian reality TV when we ran out of everything else.



## INTRODUCTION

Most of this book was written during the Covid-19 pandemic. The world changed in ways I could never have predicted when I planned this project. During the UK's first lockdown in Spring 2020, it often felt frivolous or irrelevant to be writing a book on celebrity chefs. As a volunteer coordinator with Norwich FoodHub, a local organization that redistributes surplus food to people experiencing food poverty, the urgent and material aspects of food during a pandemic felt rather more pressing. When local restaurants and catering companies were forced to close, we were inundated by waves of high-end stock. At the same time, supermarket surplus became totally unpredictable as many people stockpiled food and retailers struggled to estimate supply and demand as shopping patterns changed. Meanwhile, many people who were already living in precarious conditions were going hungry as lockdown left them with little or no income.

As I wondered whether studying celebrity chefs had any relevance during a pandemic, they rapidly emerged at the centre of numerous lockdown narratives in the British media. Celebrity chefs appeared as representatives of a hospitality sector devastated by the lockdown who attempted to support their workers and take their case to the government. They were celebrated for their resourcefulness as they diversified into an expanding market for high-end meal kits and takeaways. They emerged as heroes feeding local communities and health workers. They used their social media profiles to offer advice on what to cook in unprecedented times. As trusted public figures, celebrity chefs were also put to work to help people get through the 'crisis'. Jamie Oliver, Jack Monroe and Matt Tebutt appeared on quickly thrown together cookery series which lifestyled the lockdown experience while, as the pandemic progressed, Nadiya Hussain and Asma Khan were drafted into the NHS's campaign to tackle alleged vaccine hesitancy among British Bangladeshi communities. Celebrity chefs also joined forces with footballer Marcus Rashford to force changes to government policy in order to address child food poverty, the extent of which had been further exposed and increased by the pandemic (see Chapter 8).

Celebrity chefs might seem frivolous but they are part of the fabric of contemporary life in the UK and elsewhere. Their high-profile media presence means they have a key role in shaping contemporary foodscapes, intervening in ideas about 'what kind of food is being sold, who controls the food system, who eats

well (and who does not), as well as how resources are sustained (or deteriorated) through our food practices and engagements' (Johnston and Goodman 2015: 207). At the end of a tumultuous year in the United States, Adam Reiner (2020) claimed that 'the age of the politically agnostic chef is over'. This is perhaps unsurprising as food, the very substance of what celebrity chefs deal with, is political. What is more noteworthy, as Reiner observes, is that more celebrity chefs are explicitly politicizing food practices, whether by representing hospitality workers' interests to the government, campaigning for more environmentally sustainable practices or highlighting how sexism and racism pervade restaurant cultures. Events such as the high-profile MAD symposium in Denmark have called on chefs to take a more informed and explicit acknowledgement of their position, to 'become self-aware about the cultural shift in their activity and ... to boost their positions of authority and advocate for better recognition of their alleged contributions to the world' (Matta 2019: 194).

This might seem a long way from someone on television demonstrating how to make a cake but, as I go on to show in this book, even seemingly mundane recipes can be infused with questions about production, provenance and consumption as well as issues about nation, migration and multiculturalism. Celebrity chefs act as 'cultural intermediaries' who practise and popularize particular dispositions towards food and help to shape public understanding of what is 'good' to eat (Bourdieu 1984). These questions about 'good' and 'bad' foods are not only ethical and moral but also deeply political: how food practices are ranked and evaluated creates and reproduces forms of privilege and distinction (Naccarato and Lebesco 2012). Political interventions by celebrity chefs have become more explicit as new formats focus on campaigns to transform government policy and the food industries as well as individual behaviour (Rousseau 2012b). As I show in Chapters 5 and 6, celebrity chefs have used campaigning culinary documentaries to address wide-ranging issues, from the fishing industry and chicken welfare to child obesity and food waste. This book demonstrates, therefore, how celebrity chefs are both implicitly and explicitly bound up with the politics of food and eating.

### *What is a celebrity chef?*

The term 'celebrity chef' is widely used but also deeply problematic. Many people who are described as celebrity chefs claim not to be one. Some television stars like Nigella Lawson and Delia Smith refuse the term 'chef' because their expertise and appeal comes from their experience as home cooks rather than restaurant professionals. This shapes how they represent cooking practices. 'Cooking should not be exclusive or "cheffy". It's about sitting down around a table and having a nice meal', claims Delia (cited in Evening Standard 2012). Likewise, Nigella asserts 'I am not a chef; I am not even a trained cook ... I cook in much the same way as my readers or viewers' (cited in Day 2013).

Many restaurant chefs who have found fame on TV also strenuously reject the label celebrity chef. However, their resistance is primarily to associations

with celebrity. 'I never chased TV and I am not a celebrity chef', claims former *Masterchef: The Professionals* and *Food and Drink* presenter Michel Roux Jr (Myall 2014). Star of *The Chef's Brigade* and the British version of *My Kitchen Rules* Jason Atherton assures people that 'I'm a chef not a celebrity. I'm not interested in fame' (Thompson 2016). Back in 2001, Gordon Ramsay – who many people might consider epitomizes the celebrity chef – announced 'I am not a celebrity chef' and claimed that his TV appearances were 'about giving something back to the [hospitality] industry' (BBC News 2001). As I go on to explain in Chapter 1, these vehement refusals of the label need to be understood within the logic of the culinary field in which the pursuit of celebrity and economic success can threaten a chef's claims to legitimacy as a skilled and gifted professional. Nonetheless, it is not only high-profile restaurant chefs who resist associations with celebrity. Delia Smith and Jack Monroe refuse the term 'chef' but they also refuse the term 'celebrity' because it threatens the sense of being 'ordinary' that is, in different ways, central to their brands.

However, the label celebrity chef is widely used by the media to classify people with a public profile that is primarily associated with cooking. The use of the term may have little conceptual precision; it may unite people with significantly different levels of cooking expertise and fame. But it is also widely understood to refer to people who are famous for cooking and whose fame is the product of a significant media presence because, as Jessica Evans argues, 'celebrity *by definition* requires mediation' (cited in Driessens 2013: 548).

The forms of mediation through which people gain celebrity vary. Chapter 1 demonstrates how some big-name celebrity chefs whose standing is attached to their restaurant may make few television appearances but their reputation is shaped by newspaper restaurant reviews, food magazines and guides such as Michelin. However, television has played a key role in the development of the celebrity chef and, as I explain in Chapter 2, many well-known celebrity chefs are TV personalities as well as food experts. An on-screen presence in people's homes creates a sense of closeness between viewer and celebrity and the feeling that we 'know' them (Bennett 2010). Furthermore, while social media platforms afford established celebrities opportunities to develop their image and attain a seemingly more immediate relationship with their fans (Bennett 2010), new digital platforms such as blogs, Instagram and YouTube have also enabled the emergence of new celebrity chefs (see Lewis 2020). As I explore in Chapters 3 and 4, some of today's successful celebrity chef brands such as Deliciously Ella and BOSH! are the products of digital media.

Celebrity chefs are not the only public figures who shape ideas about what and how to eat. Josée Johnston and Mike Goodman (2015: 206, 210) refer to 'food celebrities' and 'food personalities' to capture the range of celebrities who have become 'voices of cultural and culinary authority', from Gwyneth Paltrow's association with 'healthy eating' to George Clooney's close associations with the Nespresso brand (see also Rodney et al. 2017). While celebrity chefs are included in the idea of the 'food celebrity', Johnston and Goodman highlight the multiple and diverse ways in which celebrity figures intervene in public debates about food,

often taking on a campaigning role. Although most of this book concentrates on celebrity chefs, their interventions need to be understood within this wider landscape. For example, as I go on to demonstrate in my analysis of campaigns against food poverty during the pandemic (Chapter 8), celebrity chefs joined forces with footballer Marcus Rashford who has emerged as a highly influential new food celebrity.

This book, therefore, uses the term ‘celebrity chef’ in ways that mirror its popular usage. What distinguishes celebrity chefs from the more general categories of food personalities and food celebrities is their close association with the practice of cooking. Whether primarily known as a Michelin-starred restaurant chef, a TV chef or founder of a YouTube cookery channel, the key figures in this book are celebrities who are mainly known for cooking. However, as I go on to show, their influence extends way beyond the kitchen as they use the culinary capital obtained through their roles in restaurants and the media to become significant public and political actors.

### *Studying celebrity chefs*

The study of celebrity chefs emerged out of a wider context. On the one hand, celebrities in general achieved a new visibility in popular culture and public life in the 1990s. Celebrity studies emerged as an academic sub-field that tried to make sense of the role of celebrities and to investigate the processes of celebritization that produced celebrity as, at least partly, a new phenomenon (see, for example, the journal *Celebrity Studies*; Cashmore 2006; Marshall 1997; Redmond and Holmes 2007; Rojek 2001; and Turner 2004). From the late 1990s, there was also a rapid expansion in food television which provoked academic interest in new forms of entertainment-led food programming which foregrounded a new type of celebrity chef (see Chapter 2). In the United States, this produced studies of the Food Network cable TV channel (for example, Adema 2000; Ketchum 2005, 2007; Naccarato and Lebesco 2012) and also spawned an interest in the history of cookery TV (for example, Collins 2009; Polan 2011). In the UK, the rise of lifestyle programming on broadcast TV from the late 1990s onwards provided the context for an increasing interest in new forms of cookery programme that represented cooking and eating as lifestyle practices (for example, Brunsdon 2003, 2006; Hollows 2003a, 2003b; Moseley 2000, 2001) with similar interests also emerging in Australia (for example, Bonner 2003; de Solier 2005; Lewis 2008a). The study of both celebrities and celebrity chefs also developed alongside a growing interest in the relationships between food, culture and society across a range of academic disciplines such as sociology and geography (for example, Beardsworth and Keil 1997; Bell and Valentine 1997; Warde 1997) which later also became more established in media and cultural studies (for example, Ashley et al. 2004) and other disciplines such as linguistics (for example, Matwick and Matwick 2019 and Tominc 2017).

Much research, my own included, has often been preoccupied with the contemporary and there has been far less interest in the history of celebrity chefs.

Research by Ferguson (2004) shows how, in the nineteenth century, chef Marie-Antoine Carême achieved a significant cultural impact and was a prototype of later celebrity chefs in his development of own-brand products and a media profile (see Chapter 1). However, most historical research has focused on TV chefs in the immediate pre-war and the post-war period: for example, Julia Child (Polan 2011), Marguerite Patten (Charlesworth 2022; Moseley 2009), Fanny Cradock (Geddes 2018), Marcel Boulestin (Geddes 2022) and Philip Harben (Geddes 2022). This research demonstrates the long-running influence of celebrity chefs on ideas about how and what to eat, a dynamic relationship between education and entertainment, a persistent gendering of ideas about cookery and some significant continuities between past and present. It also contributes to the history of factual programming on TV (see also Bonner 2009). While there is now a developing history of celebrity chefs on early European television (Tominc 2022a), historical research presents a particular challenge as copies of many old TV cookery shows no longer exist (Tominc 2022b).

While the role of the media in shaping how people eat is not a recent phenomenon, there has been an intensification in ‘media interventions into how we think about what we put into our bodies’ (Rousseau 2012b: xxxiii). Celebrity chefs, like the producers of food media in general, may not determine how people think about food but they are both a key source of information and knowledge about food and a ‘resource’ offering ‘possibilities, guides and recommendations’ about what and how to eat (Dickinson 1998: 267). However, the advice and information they offer is not neutral and is frequently highly normative: celebrity chefs shape ideas about ‘what becomes “permissible” and “normal” as well as “desired” in everyday discourses, practices and institutional processes’ (Boykoff et al. 2010: 5). Recommendations about how and what to eat, therefore, are shaped by assumptions about what are legitimate food practices and – often by implication or exclusion – which food practices are illegitimate or of little value. As I go on to show throughout this book, advice on eating healthily or ethically, for example, is bound up both with the politics of class, gender and race and with discourses that can naturalize political systems built on inequality.

Many of these issues emerge in a key theme of much research – the role of celebrity chefs as lifestyle experts. Many researchers were fascinated by new television series such as *The Naked Chef* and *Nigella Bites* which emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s (for example, de Solier 2005; Hollows 2003a, 2003b; Lewis 2008a; and Moseley 2001). In these series, Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson did not simply educate and inform people about how to cook but demonstrated how food practices were part of a wider lifestyle. Images of Jamie Oliver zipping around London delis on his Vespa and making food to be consumed at his band’s practice session demonstrated how cooking practices could be situated ‘in the art and aesthetics of everyday living’ (Lewis 2020: 8). These shows were seen to offer valuable advice on how to live at a time when there had been an alleged detraditionalization of established ways of life. As Rachel Moseley (2001: 39) argued, Jamie Oliver appeared to sell ‘a whole lifestyle through a discourse of accessibility and achievability, of a way to be through clothes, looks, domestic



space and ways of being a man'. From such a perspective, celebrity chefs could be seen to democratize knowledge and skills so everyone could use food to construct distinctive lifestyles. Acting as cultural intermediaries, celebrity chefs appeared to make 'available to almost everyone the distinctive poses, the distinctive games and other signs of inner riches' which were previously only associated with an intellectual elite (Bourdieu 1984: 371). However, as I explain in Chapter 2, while these celebrity chefs might have appeared to democratize food knowledges, their series represented particular types of lifestyles associated with the new middle classes as *the* legitimate way to live and, by implication, rendered other lifestyles as less legitimate.

Since this period, many researchers have examined how celebrity chefs represent particular kinds of food practices as the only legitimate food practices. As Peter Naccarato and Kathleen Lebesco (2012: 113) argue, celebrity chefs may offer access to particular forms of 'culinary capital' but this 'requires adherence to a set of privileged practices, thereby reinforcing specific cultural values and ideologies'. Many researchers, myself included, have studied how particular ways of cooking and eating are given value and held up as models of 'good' and 'appropriate' living. This is evident in the representations of food as a cool, pleasurable and youthful leisure activity in *The Naked Chef* but also in representations of the pleasures of ethical eating in the bucolic rural locations of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's *River Cottage* series in the UK and Matthew Evans' *Gourmet Farmer* in Australia (see, for example, Bell and Hollows 2011; Parkins and Craig 2011; and Phillipov 2017). These themes are developed throughout much of this book: for example, in my analysis of how particular forms of 'healthy eating' are legitimated (Chapters 3 and 6), the mainstreaming of plant-based diets (Chapter 4), the representation of environmentally responsible food practices (Chapter 5) and ideas of 'national' foods (Chapter 7).

Given women's longstanding responsibility for feeding work in the domestic sphere, it is perhaps unsurprising that much research has also focused on how celebrity chefs mediate ideas about gender and food. This can again be found in studies of Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson that investigated how they represented cooking and eating as specifically gendered lifestyle practices (see, for example, Hollows 2003a, 2003b; Leer 2016b; Moseley 2001; Sanders 2008). When celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver took on responsibility for cooking in domestic space, it was sometimes seen as a sign of progress towards a more equal gendered division of domestic labour. However, *The Naked Chef* was among a number of series that represented domestic cookery as a pleasurable, masculine leisure practice rather than part of the work of caring for the family that was a longstanding feature of feminine domestic labour (Hollows 2003a; Leer 2016a, 2016b, 2017, 2018; Rodney et al. 2017). Furthermore, many male TV chefs occupy far more conventional gender roles – for example, as mobile adventurers in culinary travelogues as I show in Chapter 7 (see, for example, Bell and Hollows 2007; Leer and Kjaer 2015) or making political interventions in the public sphere as I demonstrate in Chapters 5, 6 and 8 (see also, for example, Bell et al. 2017; Gibson and Dempsey 2013; Hollows and Jones 2010b; Pike and Kelly

2014; Rich 2011; Rousseau 2012b; Warin 2011). Moreover, many male celebrity chefs are still firmly associated with professional roles in restaurant kitchens, reproducing the assumption that professional cooking is still a primarily masculine occupation and the idea that ‘great chefs’ are male (see, for example, Johnston et al. 2014).

Much of the research on celebrity chefs has largely been the product of textual analysis of TV shows. Textual analysis alone, however, tells us little about what people make of their advice and interventions or about the extent and nature of the influence that celebrity chefs have on everyday cooking practices. Audience research by scholars such as Nick Piper (2013, 2015) and Christine Barnes (2017) addresses some of these absences by demonstrating the complex ways in which people engage with, use and resist advice from celebrity chefs (see Chapter 2). Other researchers have explored how professional chefs understand ‘celebrity’ and media engagement and the impact it has on their career trajectories (see, for example, Lee 2014 and Curnutt 2015; see Chapter 1). Celebrity chefs do not simply appear from nowhere. Their brands are not only developed by specialist PR agents (see Chapter 2) but also through the work of TV producers and other media professionals who help to create cookery TV, cookbooks and social media content. Researchers such as Gilly Smith (2020), David Inglis and Ana-Mari Almila (2019) and Luke van Ryn (2018) offer insights into how media production practices shape food television and the careers of celebrity chefs.

As the discussion above suggests, many debates about celebrity chefs have centred around television – and, to a lesser extent, cookbooks – because these are the media spaces where many celebrity chefs established their profile. However, as the distinctions between ‘older’ and ‘newer’ media forms become less meaningful, digital media are fertile spaces for building celebrity chef brands. As Mike Goodman and Sylvia Jaworska (2020: 3) observe, while established ‘TV-based food celebrities’ migrate onto digital platforms, ‘many have been eclipsed or are in competition with the likes of food vloggers, bloggers and other personalities who originated in these digital food landscapes and then move into “offline” spaces’. This is reflected in a range of recent publications that try to get to grips with the specificity, affordances and content of digital food media (Leer and Strøm Krogager 2021; Lewis 2020; Lupton and Feldman 2020; see also the earlier Rousseau 2012a). While many of the chapters in this book focus on TV texts and their associated intertexts, I also consider the new forms of ‘celebrity chef’ that emerge out of blogging platforms and YouTube and how they have shaped food knowledges (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4).

However, in order to understand the significance of celebrity chefs, one cannot stay for very long with one textual or media form. Their interventions and influence spill out in many directions across social media and newspaper commentary, into parliamentary committees and mass petitions, via supermarket endorsements and product advertising and into our kitchens through the recipes we cook, the chopping techniques we adopt or the celebrity-branded pans or sauces we use. In order to understand the significance of celebrity chefs in contemporary culture, this book attempts to follow them as they veer off in many directions.

*About this book*

This book examines food media to demonstrate how celebrity chefs have shaped the politics of eating in the UK in the twenty-first century. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, I examine how celebrity chefs shape how we feed ourselves and how we think about food and its role in social and cultural life. The book demonstrates how celebrity chefs act as cultural intermediaries who not only play a role in defining what is 'good' and 'bad' food but also how we should shop, cook and eat. As I go on to show, their advice is entangled with wider questions about class, gender, race, health and the environment that extend beyond the culinary field. In food media, judgements about the value of food practices are also often judgements about the value – and values – of different groups of people. The book demonstrates how celebrity chefs impact on many aspects of contemporary life, from ideas about healthy eating and veganism through to food scares and fish sustainability. I highlight how some celebrity chefs have also become activists and campaigners who intervene in public policy and become caught up with contemporary politics around racism, Brexit and food poverty.

The early chapters of this book introduce the emergence and characteristics of different types of celebrity chef and their relationships to food media. While some restaurant-based chefs are dependent on media to promote their businesses, other celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver, Giada De Laurentiis and Guy Fieri are primarily TV stars. Others such as Andrew Rea – famed for his YouTube channel *Binging with Babish* – emerge as celebrities through digital media. Across the first four chapters, I demonstrate the power of celebrity chefs and how they shape the meaning of food and the ways in which this intersects with lived experience and the politics of everyday life. The second part of the book examines how celebrity chefs have adopted a more explicitly political role as they have become public figures who act as political intermediaries who seek to effect change.

While interdisciplinary in nature, the book's approach lies on the cusp between food studies and media and cultural studies. To understand contemporary food media, it is necessary to think about the significance of both media (the forms, practices and genres that shape how meaning is produced) and food (production, distribution, regulation and consumption) together. The conceptual framework and theoretical perspectives I engage with throughout are shaped by both fields as I think about issues ranging from taste and provenance to inequality and neoliberalism. Crucially, I think about how celebrity chefs are produced through the logics of two distinct but overlapping fields – the culinary field and the field of media.

Given the proliferation of both food media and celebrity chefs, I have narrowed down my field of study by largely focusing on celebrity chefs in the UK. However, many of the celebrity chefs I discuss – for example, Jamie Oliver and Gordon Ramsay – are well-established global brands whose output is sold across a range of territories and who also produce content tailored to different national and supranational markets. Even back in the early 2000s, I kept finding that Jamie Oliver followed me on holiday. In a Brittany bookshop, I discovered tables

stacked high with French translations of his early cookbooks, recommending his accessible style with the description '*sans chichi ni tralala*' [without fuss or frills]. In Hamburg, I saw a large cut out of Jamie Oliver with the line 'Englands Junger Spitzenkoch' [England's young top chef] in the window of a kitchen shop. In Copenhagen, a restaurant casually displayed a copy of a Jamie Oliver cookbook on shelves while I ate my dinner. The global success of British celebrity chefs in the period is backed up by less anecdotal evidence. In 2002, Oliver's newly launched television company Fresh One produced the series *Oliver's Twist* to launch him in a global market. It was 'sold to over 200 territories' (Barraclough 2014). It was not only Oliver's cookbooks and cooking series that found audiences abroad. His campaigning documentaries aired in a range of international markets and also spawned localized versions such as *Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution* in the United States. Numerous British celebrity chefs, therefore, have a massive international reach. Alongside Jamie Oliver, celebrity chefs such as Gordon Ramsay and Nigella Lawson are global stars. On *Masterchef Australia* contestants swoon when British-based chefs such as Yotam Ottolenghi, Nigella Lawson or Heston Blumenthal make appearances, demonstrating the extent of their star power.

The influence of British food media cannot simply be understood in terms of these celebrity chefs alone and producers such as Pat Llewellyn played a key role in creating new forms of British cookery television that had a huge international influence (see Chapter 2). The development of lifestyle cookery programming in Britain in the late 1990s which enabled the emergence of new types of celebrity chefs such as Jamie and Nigella also impacted on the types of celebrity chefs that emerged elsewhere. Celebrity chefs such as Tim Mälzer in Germany and Bill Granger in Australia were hailed as the home-grown version of Jamie Oliver. British lifestyle cookery formats were adopted and adapted in different locations: for example, Ana Tominc (2017) documents how Luka and Valentina Smej Novak emerged as celebrity chefs in Slovenia by employing elements of these formats. Therefore, while the focus of this book is on British celebrity chefs, the global influence of the UK on food media means that the discussion has a much wider resonance.

Furthermore, as I go on to show, it is increasingly difficult to think of food media simply in national terms. While there is a well-established global trade in food television programmes and formats – especially after the rise of specialist cable and satellite channels devoted to food – the development of streaming services such as Netflix has made conventional national boundaries of transmission less important, although far from irrelevant. Furthermore, the emergence of new forms of food media and celebrity chefs on social media platforms such as YouTube also makes it increasingly difficult to think about celebrity chefs in strictly national terms. Therefore, while my focus is the UK, the themes, arguments and texts I discuss have purchase across a range of different national and supranational contexts, although how the politics of food media play out frequently has a specifically national flavour and resonance.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I explore how 'celebrity' can operate in different ways for those celebrity chefs primarily operating in the gastronomic realm of restaurants

and those whose celebrity is primarily a product of their role as television personalities. Chapter 1 examines how celebrity operates in the culinary field that shapes the careers and standing of chefs. I demonstrate that, while celebrity status in the culinary field is primarily associated with qualities such as artistry and innovation, star chefs in the restaurant industry are nonetheless dependent on the media to achieve visibility and promote their brands. I investigate the role of food media in building chefs' profiles through an analysis of series such as Netflix's *Chef's Table* and *The Final Table*. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, I show how celebrity in the culinary field involves a delicate balancing act between investing in the chef's art and pursuing economic success and fame. I also demonstrate how the culinary field, like other cultural fields, is based on exclusion and highlight how gender, race and ethnicity impact on a chef's ability to achieve success, visibility and celebrity.

Chapter 2 explores celebrity chefs in relation to the media industries. The chapter offers a brief history of celebrity chefs and cookery TV before going on to examine the significance of the new wave of celebrity chefs who emerged in lifestyle television formats from the late 1990s onwards. I highlight how the conventions of food television shape the ways in which different lifestyle choices, tastes and food practices are mediated and how this produces, and reproduces, classed and gendered distinctions. The chapter demonstrates how celebrity chefs' brands are negotiated across different sites and media and how established celebrity chefs have increasingly migrated across a range of digital platforms. I also show how these digital platforms have enabled the emergence of new forms of food celebrity and question whether this has led to the democratization of culinary expertise.

Chapters 3 and 4 largely focus on celebrity chefs who emerged via digital platforms and both explore the gendering of food practices. In Chapter 3, I examine how celebrity chefs mediate ideas about 'healthy eating'. Through an analysis of 'clean eating' practices associated with the Deliciously Ella blog, I demonstrate how women are encouraged to use food as a form of self-care and empowerment within a wider neoliberal context in which people are increasingly responsibilized for their own health while welfare provision is eroded. Blogs such as Deliciously Ella promise an end to diets while continuing to identify femininity with a slender and glowing (white) body. As a contrast, I examine the hugely successful Pinch of Nom, a multi-platform diet brand led by 'anti-celebrity' chefs, to demonstrate how diets can also be used as a mode of classed resistance to middle-class forms of 'healthism' (Crawford 2006). In Chapter 4, I focus on the rise of male celebrity chefs promoting vegan diets through an analysis of BOSH!, Avant-Garde Vegan and the Dirty Vegan. The chapter demonstrates how the potentially feminine associations of plant-based eating are displaced through a masculinization of veganism, partly achieved through a meatification of vegan foods. While these celebrity chefs have helped to mainstream vegan eating, I show how they also represent plant-based diets in terms of an aesthetics of lifestyle and consumer choice, downplaying many of the political dimensions of ethical veganism.

In Chapter 5, I turn to the more overtly political roles adopted by celebrity chefs that use the televisual format of the campaigning culinary documentary. The

chapter introduces the key features of the format and identifies how it emerged as a key strand in British food TV, and as a key vehicle for building celebrity chefs' brands, which was also deployed in other national contexts – for example, in Matthew Evans *For the Love of Meat* (2016) in Australia (Phillipov 2017). Through a case study of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's campaigning culinary documentaries which focus on the ethical and environmental aspects of food, I identify how the format enables celebrity chefs to emerge as public figures who not only seek to transform viewers' practices but also intervene in public policy, institutions and the food industry.

Campaigning culinary documentaries are also part of my focus in Chapter 6 which analyses how celebrity chefs mediated the virtues of frugality and thrift during a period of austerity policies implemented by the UK government. I demonstrate how celebrity chefs contributed to a range of austerity narratives, frequently using visual motifs and discourses associated with 'austerity chic'. The chapter shows how Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall used campaigning culinary documentaries that, while not uncritical of government actions, naturalized austerity policies by demonstrating how 'bad' and 'unhealthy' food practices – and the (working-class) people associated with them – were an unnecessary drain on the welfare state. The chapter also examines how the BBC 'makeover' series *Eat Well for Less* with celebrity chefs Gregg Wallace and Chris Bavin reinforced the values of thrift and frugality. However, the chapter also shows that celebrity chefs did not make uniform response to the austerity agenda and highlights the significance of Jack Monroe who used food media to construct an anti-austerity position that challenged government policy and its demonization of the poor.

The culinary travelogue is another TV format that has proved useful in building celebrity chefs' brands and, in Chapter 7, I explore how these shows mediate ideas about the nation and national cuisines. Although the chapter focuses on British examples, the culinary travelogue is a format that is put to work in many similar ways across a range of national and international contexts. I examine how celebrity chefs such as Rick Stein and the Hairy Bikers represent British food in limited and conservative ways and imagine Britishness in relation to a pre-modern past that can easily be traded in a global television market for 'heritage'. Using case studies focusing on Jamie Oliver and Nadiya Hussain, I explore how celebrity chefs have attempted to represent a more 'diverse' and 'multicultural' Britain and their impact on ideas about both Britishness and British food. Finally, I identify how Jamie Oliver's culinary travelogues around continental Europe use identifications with Europe to reflect on the problems with British food practices.

If food is caught up in wider political agendas (DeSoucey 2010), it is perhaps unsurprising that, as key public authorities on culinary matters, celebrity chefs respond to political currents. For examples, chefs' interventions in debates about #MeToo and Black Lives Matter have been important across a range of national contexts. In Chapter 8, I examine how celebrity chefs intervened in two of the major political events in early twenty-first-century Britain: Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. In the first half of the chapter, I chart Jamie Oliver's often contradictory

position-taking within Brexit's discursive framework – from the pro-European identifications explored in Chapter 7, via anti-EU positions in debates about food regulation through to pro-EU identifications in the aftermath of the 2016 Referendum on membership of the EU. In the process, I demonstrate how national and supranational identities were mobilized in celebrity chefs' campaigns about food safety in relation to government negotiations on a new trade deal with the United States. The second part of the chapter examines the role of celebrity chefs in response to the pandemic. I focus on two particular examples – lockdown cookery shows and campaigns about food poverty associated with footballer Marcus Rashford – and identify two key meanings of austerity that emerged in response to the pandemic: austerity as the absence of consumer choice about food and austerity as the absence of food.

Much of this book highlights how celebrity chefs are contradictory figures. They act as moral entrepreneurs who help to form public opinion and feeling and shape the contemporary imagination about food matters. They recruit people to campaigns while also polarizing public opinion. While much of my argument demonstrates how the narratives, discourses and makeovers used by celebrity chefs help to reproduce unequal power relations, they also act as public figures that hold government and industry to account. And, as I demonstrate in Chapter 8, food celebrities also have the capacity to reshape the ways in which political issues are imagined and to empower people to engage in collective action.



## Chapter 1

### CELEBRITY CHEFS, RESTAURANT INDUSTRIES AND THE CULINARY FIELD

While most of this book focuses on celebrity chefs as media figures, this chapter focuses on how celebrity operates within the restaurant industry and the culinary field. Many star restaurant chefs do not become television chefs or other kinds of media celebrity yet they still use the media to build their profiles. Using the media to build a brand is now part of the job of many chefs who own or lead restaurants. For some chefs, this might involve TV appearances or columns in the press; for many more, posting on social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram has become part of their everyday labour (Giousmpasoglou et al. 2019; Lee 2014). While some chefs trade a career in the kitchen for one in TV (Curnutt 2015), even chefs with little desire for media attention often build social media profiles to promote their restaurants.

However, the pursuit of celebrity, fame and money poses risks for the professional reputation of chefs. Chefs may be keen to distance themselves from the label ‘celebrity chef’ because they want to be recognized for their culinary skills as chefs rather than their ability to entertain media audiences. In order to think through these issues, I distinguish between different forms of culinary celebrity. For some chefs, their celebrity comes from their position within the ‘culinary field’ (Ferguson 2001). Examples include chefs such as Ferran Adria, the Roca brothers and Massimo Bottura whose position is primarily a result of their critical reception within the culinary field as they earn awards and rave reviews from influential restaurant critics. Other chefs use celebrity as a ‘competitive resource’ that enables them to move across a range of fields, building a wider media profile (Driessens 2013). The reputation of celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver, Ainsley Harriott, Manu Feidel and Anthony Bourdain is, in different ways, largely a result of their media exposure. As I go on to show, many chefs attempt to balance the quest for legitimacy and professional recognition with the desire for financial success and a public profile. The next two sections explore these issues by examining the role of branding and celebrity in the restaurant industries.

I then explore two case studies of how chefs are branded in different kinds of formats within cookery TV. The first focuses on competition formats featuring professional chefs such as *Top Chef* in the United States, the *Great British Menu* in the UK and Netflix’s international battle of the chefs *The Final Table* and examines