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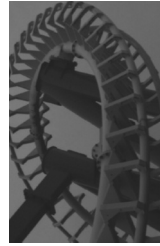
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The 'Social Life' of Scouse: Understanding Contemporary Liverpool through Changing Food Practices

■ **Ciara Kierans**

University of Liverpool, UK

■ **Jane Haeney**

Liverpool, John Moores University, UK

ABSTRACT

Questions of heritage, tradition and authenticity have been pushed to the fore by attempts to engineer a cultural and social 'renaissance' in the city of Liverpool, particularly in light of its recent European Capital of Culture status in 2008. Much of this reinvention has been discursive, asserting continuities with a re-imagined globalized, polyethnic and merchant past. This discursive turn has encouraged a resurgence of interest in the symbolic and cultural identities of Liverpool. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the dish, 'scouse' (and, the 'Scousers' who eat it) as it makes the transition from working class kitchens to the city's well-to-do restaurants and bars. By drawing on the food history of Liverpool's port, ethnographic observations and narrative accounts of food experiences, this article traces the 'social life' of scouse from its historical origins and symbolic links to poverty and identity to its emergence as a repositioned culinary cultural artefact of urban regeneration.

KEY WORDS

food / food practices / food production and consumption / globalization / glocalization / heritage / Liverpool / scouse / urban regeneration

Introduction: Tracing the 'Social Life' of Scouse

By drawing on the food history of Liverpool, ethnographic observation and narrative accounts of food experiences, this article traces the 'social life' (Appadurai, 1986) of scouse. Scouse is essentially a stew of meat and

vegetables. It combines the preparations eaten by the Irish poor and a seaman's stew, a staple of Northern European fishermen, who introduced versions of it through the port. As we will go on to discuss, scouse is a dish that is easily improvised, made up of ingredients-to-hand, and one that, as a result, varies from table to table. It is historically embedded in the city's migrant past, and has, over time, come to denote the identity and character of Liverpudlians. Scouse, as both culinary artefact and identity marker, will be traced from its historical origins and symbolic links with urban poverty, to its emergence as a repositioned cultural symbol of urban regeneration.

Our aim is to show that scouse, a hybrid food, is an aid to thought, useful for demonstrating the various ways in which the global-local relationship is materialized in contemporary, culturally driven forms of urban development. This, in particular, reflects new patterns of consumption as the vernacular and local are transformed into new productive value-chains and resources for cosmopolitan city dwellers, tourists and market planners. While the commodification of local identities, practices and goods has been articulated, recognized and described in other regenerating and developing urban centres, we argue that rather than producing generic or universal effects, these are, instead, social processes, whose logics are differentially played out within cities, producing culturally situated relations of social difference.

Methods of Data Collection

The materials used in this article were collected between 2005 and 2007 and form part of a broader ethnographic study on changing food practices and their implications for health and well-being within Liverpool communities. The study is both historical and intergenerational and examines the transmission and significance of traditional food in social and cultural contexts. Participant and non-participant observations were conducted throughout many of the city's bars, restaurants and public venues, while a series of ethnographic interviews were carried out with local people, chefs, restaurant and bar owners, retailers, local historians, teachers, community workers and so on, all of whom provided their memories and reflections on scouse. In addition, through a process of chain sampling, eight families were contacted; two comprised four generations and six comprised three generations. In all, 28 participants, of mixed gender and socio-economic background, covering an age-range from 16 to 98 years, were interviewed in their own homes.

This combination of observational, archival and narrative data was analysed with a view to identifying the ways in which scouse came to be embedded within various forms of social, cultural and economic life in the city. This involved paying attention to the ways in which respondents disclosed the multiple meanings scouse has had and continues to have for them. In light of this, what follows is an examination of scouse as it is presented through the archives and local memory, in its transformation from the humble maritime dish of

Scandinavian seamen, to a staple of the city's poor, to a valuable and viable new commodity in a city keen to market its local culture:

Scouser, Scouser ... People in Manchester call us Scousers, Micky Mousers, which is a play on Cockney rhyming slang, so everybody knows that people from Liverpool are Scousers and you go anywhere and people don't recognize you or don't remember your name, they still call you, Scouser. (Anthony, aged 37, a draughtsman from Stoneycroft, Liverpool)

Liverpool: Social Change in a Regenerating City

The city of Liverpool is anchored in the global imagination, secured by the iconic image of its waterfront (Woodland, 2003), the music of the Beatles and the popularity of the city's football teams. It is a city of architectural distinction, boasting a fine Georgian and Regency heritage, a legacy of its rich maritime and merchant past. However, like other UK merchant port cities, such as Glasgow, Newcastle, Cardiff and Belfast, Liverpool has been affected by a new international division of labour and the shifting distribution of world trade, two world wars, successive recessions and a continually falling population (Meegan, 2003; Paddison, 1993). These processes have led to a steady decline across the 20th century, culminating in a dramatic shift in cities once characterized by their merchant, manufacturing and financial activities to urban centres marred by high and persistent levels of social deprivation. Liverpool, in particular, once characterized as Britain's largest provincial port, a globalized city in its own right, is now noted for incorporating some of the most disadvantaged locales in Western Europe.

From the 1970s onwards, life in Liverpool came to be framed against a background of high unemployment, poor quality, degraded and degrading housing stock, ever higher council taxes, and an anomic and poorly developed city centre – a set of deep-seated structural problems that city authorities proved themselves able (or willing) to do little about. Today, after almost five decades of external intervention and financial support, most significantly qualification for the European Union's 'Objective 1' aid programme, the city has begun the drive to reposition itself in the local, national and European-regional imaginary as a pioneering city of regeneration: a new model for old urban Europe. This has given rise to a new vision for the city, and recent years have seen waves of investment, both private and public, fuelling the beginnings of a commercial and cultural revival.

While investment has been largely conditional on subsidies, investor confidence in the city has markedly improved and has led to a growing demand for office space, retail premises, restaurants, pubs, hotels, apartments, a reduction in unemployment and a gradual increase in overall population levels. In a publication dedicated to Liverpool's most recent transformations, Munck (2003) argues that regeneration has provided the unifying logic, underpinning efforts to rebuild the city's social, cultural and economic identity. Liverpool's renaissance was recently showcased in its 2008 European Capital of Culture Year.

Regeneration and the Globalization of the Local

With Glasgow's use of 'cultural capital' to drive its urban regeneration as one of the most visible recent examples, culture-driven strategies have been identified as 'part of a new orthodoxy by which cities seek to enhance their competitive position' within an increasingly globalized marketplace (Miles and Paddison, 2005: 833; see also Garcia, 2004; Gibson and Stevenson, 2004; Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007; Hughson, 2004; Jeanotte, 2003; Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004; Kwang-Suk, 2007; Wilks-Heeg and North, 2004). It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that Liverpool has opted to take a similar approach, a strategic choice reflected in the decision to bid for Capital of Culture status (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004; Miles and Paddison, 2005).

However, there are good reasons for treating Liverpool as a long-term participant in globalized economic and cultural processes. While retaining a distinct identity within the UK (Lane, 1997), it has been argued that Liverpool's historical status as a global port has meant that Liverpudlians have always been able to regard themselves and their city as occupying a well established place in the world. As global trade flourished in the 19th century, introducing new goods through the port of Liverpool, it also introduced, over time, a large number of new migrant populations, including the Chinese, Irish immigrants fleeing the famine, Russian and Polish Jews fleeing the pogroms, Italians and Eastern Europeans escaping political unrest, and Somali traders (Lane, 1997). Many nationalities were represented in ships' crews and although some were transient, those who stayed, such as the Norwegians and Swedes, established their own places of worship, carving out an enduring social and cultural niche within the overall pattern of city life. While this patterning of cultural influence is replicated in other northern British port cities, most notably Newcastle (Byrne, 1999), some writers have argued that in the life of Liverpool's inhabitants, connections overseas should be treated as having precedence over any organic connections to the rest of Britain (Sassen, 2003). In and through their presence, these diverse peoples have helped shape the identity, character and social practices of the city. As we shall go on to demonstrate, nowhere do we find a better exemplar of these quotidian cultural integrations and their local expression, than in the well known Liverpool dish called scouse.

It is a measure of the complex processes that commentators seek to capture through the concept of globalization that cities like Liverpool have been cast, almost simultaneously, as victims and beneficiaries of the profound changes that accompany the accelerated drive towards globalized systems of world trade based on new forms of social, cultural and technological exchange. In the face of one or other reductionist account, some theorists argue that globalization presents many faces, and that it cannot easily be captured by straightforward distinctions between the economic, the social, the cultural, the spatial (and territorial), and the historical (Appadurai, 1990; Hannerz, 1992). Instead, they argue we should look to the ways in which those distinctions are continuously drawn, redrawn, blurred and elided in the course of the everyday practices which constitute both the local and the global in particular settings.

In the case of Liverpool, the complexities are evident. In the first instance, its distinctiveness as a city reflects the rich cultural diversity that accompanied its status as a major global port, a key link in the chain of international trade in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Until recently, however, that distinctiveness had become a stigma, a marker of the idiosyncrasies of a parochial urban centre marginalized by changes to the flow of trade around the world over the latter half of the 20th century. Nonetheless, as elsewhere, city authorities have come to see Liverpool's distinctiveness as one of its most valuable assets, a social, cultural and commercial resource that will enable them to realign the city with the contours of a global economy that had seemingly left it behind. Yet, at the same time, according to a major strand of theorizing on the subject of globalization, most attempts to realign cities or regions with the global economy undermine the distinctiveness of the local cultural identities they depend upon by promoting cultural homogenization, commoditization and Americanization (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004; McLuhan, 1964; Pascal, 1987). Thus, globalization can be seen at once as a strength, a weakness, a potent resource and a threat to the integrity of the city and the eclectic mix of peoples and ways of living which give the place its unique character.

When examining these complexities through investigations of the facts of individual cases, it is important to concentrate on the contingently realized complexities and flexibilities of urban development, as well as the benefits of the large-scale flow of people, finance and cultural forces across borders (Amin and Graham, 1997; Ong, 1991). Globalization, to put it bluntly, should not be glossed as a closed, one-way process and we should be cautious of the idea that there is a logical or necessary connection between globalization and homogeneity (Appadurai, 1990). Rather, according to Appadurai, globalization is composed of overlapping and disjunctive orders, where the 'glocal' – i.e. the various ways in which the 'global' and the 'local' form a dialectical relationship – produces hybridizations that are difficult to grasp in polarized terms (Robertson, 1992, 1995; Wellman, 2001). The concept of 'glocalization' demonstrates the capacities of social agents to bridge the scales of distance, meaning and association, producing localities for global consumption (Robertson, 1992). In so doing, it highlights increasingly differentiated consumers, consumer traditions and cultural capital formations as drivers of a new desire for the old and familiar.

Scouse exemplifies and embodies the glocal and the heterogenizing aspects of global processes. Like other 'British' dishes such as the curry (Shrabani, 1999), it reflects a process of indigenization, where global flows of goods, people and cultural frameworks find specific translations across and within local domains. Far from having a homogenizing effect, the processes by which imported (xenological) foodstuffs are accommodated within local frames of reference give rise to an increase in the production and consumption of locality and difference (Bauman, 1998, 2007; Friedman, 1995; Hannerz, 1990). As both a culinary artefact and emblem of the city, scouse represents a point where competing perspectives and divergent elements connected to the past, present and future of Liverpool intersect and combine in continuously evolving and contested vernacular practices.

Theorizing Food as a Component of Regeneration

In recent times, there has been a growing interest in drawing on food, eating and culinary practices to analyse the multiple hybridizations promoted by global processes (Phillips, 2006). As patterns of food consumption generate increasingly elaborate fusions of the new and the old, the near and the far, the exotic and the readily available, research attention has turned to the cosmopolitan lifestyles which accelerate the pace of globalization and encourage a greater orientation to socio-economic complexities and the building and rebuilding of identities through cultural capital and consumption (Hannerz, 1990; Thompson and Tambyah, 1999). In the context of a 'foody' cosmopolitanism, the resounding emphasis is on the production of difference for consumption, turning local commodities into new objects of aesthetic and culinary value that are seen as particularly desirable for more affluent populations (MacCannell, 1989).

Urban regeneration projects throughout the UK have consciously encouraged this re-combining, reproduction and repackaging of local culture as a key catalyst of city redevelopment (Bailey et al., 2004; Garcia, 2004; Hughson, 2004; Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004; Miles and Paddison, 2005: 833; Wilks-Heeg and North, 2004). This has been most graphically illustrated in the 'Core Cities Initiative', comprising the cities of Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield. This initiative has recognized that collectively, their economic well-being, competitive edge, pride of place and fundamental identity are intrinsically bound up with their culture, similarities in history and recent drives towards regeneration (Comedia, 2003; Paddison, 1993).

However, while much of the attention has been focused on the artistic, sporting and architectural as cultural drivers shaping consumption (Bailey et al., 2004; Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2004; Garcia, 2004; Hughson, 2004; Inglis, 2008), less attention has been given to the importance of local food industries, which appear as outcomes of rather than contributors to wider regeneration efforts. However, in the 2005 volume of *Architectural Design*, dedicated to the importance of food in urban culture, food was shown to be central to how cities compete with each other to attract capital and meet the lifestyle needs of new classes of city dwellers, highlighting transformations in urban culinary culture as markers of new forms of urban inhabitation (Bell and Binnie, 2005). While concerns remain that the generic is being promoted at the expense of the vernacular, paradoxically killing off 'heritage' in the process (Porter and Barber, 2006; Zukin, 1991), Bell and Binnie draw attention to the mixing of old and new forms, a process which enhances creative energy and the diversity of food experiences. Looking at regeneration in Manchester in particular, these authors detail how the city's new restaurants, gastro-pubs, food halls, traditional outdoor markets and cafes have come to demarcate Manchester's expanding city quarters, signifying successful regeneration, while blending styles, traditions and tastes.

While theorizing the city and its consumption practices has generated intense scholarly debate, some commentators argue that all too often we still rely upon 'unproblematic generalizations' about the city (Shields, 1995). These are often organized by externalized polemics of opportunity and inequality, difference and sameness, high-brow consumers and low-brow consumers that operate with little reference to specific settings (Holt, 1998). Shields argues, in response, for the construction of multidimensional analyses to allow parallel and conflicting representations of cities and their denizens to co-exist (Shields, 1995). This involves attending to the variegated character of city life and the trans-local processes that make (or partially make) our cities and recognizing that, as a result, transnational and global activity will not always assume the same predictable, uniform garb as its particular logics are played out across localities and in the relationships between communities (Rogers, 2004).

It is just as problematic to reduce the relationship between food and regeneration to abstract processes which connect unspecified groups of social actors in similarly deterministic ways. What we want to do in this article is privilege the empirical ground of food consumption in a particular setting at a time when the city in question, Liverpool, is actively regenerating. We will do this by examining how scouse – traditionally associated with the city's poorer classes but now surfacing as an item in many of Liverpool's rapidly up-and-coming restaurants and bars – has become one of the more distinctive and distinguishing culinary artefacts of a city in the process of transforming itself. Scouse, in other words, will be treated as a new symbol of Shields' variegated processes of urban change and a shifting marker of locality, social identity and cultural boundaries.

Methodological Orientation

Our methodological orientation is to treat the commodification of local dishes like scouse as social processes in which they are culturally marked as being a certain kind of 'thing' (Kopytoff, 1986). We aim to show that as commodities are used, they do not produce universal effects but materialize relations of social difference. Through the focus on the 'social life of the [culinary] object' (Appadurai, 1986), scouse becomes a heuristic device that opens up the practices that surround food consumption as they appear in and through the understandings and actions of social actors. This in turn helps us to understand how the symbolic character of scouse has become a public resource, a device for constructing meaning within different social groups. On this reading, regeneration can be understood as a symbolic process of cultural renaissance within the parameters of which scouse, in this instance, constitutes an empirical site of meaning-making.

Rather than treat the cultural meanings which are attached to food, culture and regeneration as objectively or ontologically given, we shall instead examine the ways in which they are discursively mapped and materially practised under contingent circumstances (De Certeau, 1984). By focusing on scouse, we will

also show that linking culinary practices to regeneration necessarily involves a cannibalization of the local symbolic character of food so that it can be made fit for de-localized processes of consumption. In the case of scouse, as we will demonstrate, this means investing food with more durable meanings than those which locals draw upon in the course of their everyday lives. A broader cultural paradox we will consider is, thus, whether in repackaging 'culture for sale', difference and diversity must necessarily become repressed in order to sell that difference as a cultural commodity.

New Consumption Practices in a Changing City

Liverpool's history is intimately linked to varieties of foodstuffs and the processes of global consumption and production through which they became available. The growth of the city's port and waterfront in the late 18th century was not accidental; its location provided a convenient centre for the packaging and export of goods from the north, and the import and processing of goods from the colonies. The mills of Rank, Spiller and Wilson ground grain from both Canada and the American Midwest, while the mills of Joseph Heap husked Indian and Burmese rice (Lane, 1997).

As the port grew, the international mobility of goods and trade produced an equally cosmopolitan merchant city, with diverse populations introducing their own traditions and food practices. The growing West African population provided a ready market for yams, plantains and sweet potatoes (Lane, 1997); Jewish shopkeepers sold what were to local people 'foreign' foods, such as bagels, sauerkraut, salt beef and rye bread (Liverpool Women's History Group, 2002); and while German immigrants dominated the pork butchery trade, many Italian families ran grocery stores, introducing Italian foods and acquiring reputations for their home-made ice-cream (Cooke, 2002).

It is scouse, however, which stands out as particularly emblematic of the globalized social character of the city. With close connections to what Danish fishermen called 'lobescowes', and Norwegian fishermen 'lapsskaus' or 'lab-skause', scouse was a dish which came to the city by virtue of its maritime connections. However, in Liverpool, scouse has become so thoroughly indigenized (Appadurai, 1986), so taken for granted as a feature of the landscape of eating, that the Scandinavian origins of scouse come as a shock to many. Anthony, a local man who went to work in Denmark as a draughtsman, recalled his surprise at seeing scouse sitting on a supermarket shelf:

[a]nd I spoke ... to this woman I was working for and mentioned that I'd seen scouse in a tin in a Danish supermarket and I said that was our local dish and that's what we lived on... erm... and they called it 'Lobscous' and that was a poor man's meal – that's what they said ... I was surprised ... and she was more surprised that we would adopt that dish as our local dish. (Anthony, aged 37, a draughtsman from Stoneycroft, Liverpool)

Representing the archetypical 'poor man's meal' in Denmark, the social history of Liverpool's 'scouse' led to it too being designated the food of the poor. In the process, it has come to serve as a potent marker of social identity in a city deeply divided by class and ethnicity.

Food, Boundary Making, Class and Identity

While the Victorian era saw the city at the peak of its economic and industrial prosperity, it was also a place of dramatic social divisions, where great wealth and power sat alongside terrible poverty (Meegan, 2003). These divisions were further exacerbated by the Irish famine in 1846 with growing numbers of Ireland's poor settling in Liverpool. The social dualities which would grow to characterize Liverpool were not only reflected in the city's expanding slums, new migrant populations, and poor sanitation, health care, education and working conditions (Midwinter, 1971), but in the changing practices of food consumption. Food had to be cheap but substantial. Few people possessed cooking facilities beyond a single pot and an open fire and, as a result, one-pot cooking featured heavily in poor households (Westland, 1978). Against this restricted economic and culinary background, scouse emerged as a readily available, low cost option.

The association of scouse as the food of Liverpool's impoverished classes is well documented in the city's historical archives. While 'poorman's scouse' was generally made with various quantities of meat, potatoes, carrots and onions, the further down the poverty line one went, the less meat was put in until it became 'blind scouse', a version that contained no meat at all and was more like a broth (Shaw, 1988). Scouse was a meal that cost a little but could feed a lot, and associations grew linking it as the food of the working or 'scouse' class (Shaw, 1988).

Through the very ordinariness of the way in which it was prepared and the lack of ceremony with which it was eaten (Cooke, 1987), scouse came to signify a particular type of person who was set apart by this lack of elaboration, exemplifying hierarchies of class in Victorian Liverpool that were partly maintained through differential control over, and access to, food (Lupton, 1996).

The relationship between scouse the dish and the Liverpoolian who ate it has since developed into one of the more distinctive cultural identities of contemporary Liverpool (Camporesi, 1998). Memories of scouse, as an integral aspect of family meals and as a marker of social division, are as apparent in the stories of Liverpoolians today as in the historical archives, the eating or avoidance of this dish neatly separating lower from higher social classes, Scouser from non-Scouser. These persistent divisions, and associations with working class identity, are illustrated in the narrative segments which follow:

Scouse is more than just a dish of meat and vegetables because you've taken on the identity of the dish and I... but correct me if I'm wrong, I don't know of any other group... that's known by what they consume. I mean... if someone says to me, 'You're a Scouser', you automatically eat scouse, it's like you've been named after that dish... erm... and the dialect as well, *scouse* ... and what you think of when

you think of scouse is people from Liverpool... If I went to Manchester and said to somebody what does the word 'Scouser' sum up to them, I know it would be the fact that they have an image of a dodgy individual in a tracksuit trying to steal something... erm... but that's the stereotypical image of Liverpool. (Derek, aged 52, secondary school teacher)

We didn't call it scouse, we called it stew... erm... my father was... erm... he came from a good family and he was a bit of a snob, even though he worked on the docks, he was quite well bred, so he didn't call it scouse, he called it stew. (Rose, aged 73, widow of dockworker)

These excerpts demonstrate that scouse as a food traverses the frontier between the social world and the self, making true the adage, 'you are what you eat' (Fischler, 1988). In so doing, it discloses the specific ways in which this identity is both constructed and maintained through social practice and place, i.e. the specific social practices of consumption and discursive interactions, the significance of locality and the interconnected arenas where scouse identities 'get done'.

As a field of practice, scouse identity is most readily expressed through local patterns of consumption where the eating and preparing of scouse establishes and expresses social and cultural solidarity and demarcation (Bourdieu, 1984). Because of this, it continues to mark the distinctions between classes within the city of Liverpool, while distinguishing Liverpudlians from the rest of the UK. Ideas of place – connected to particular corners of the city, roads, lanes, old and established working class neighbourhoods and so on – are inflected by the over-layering of the history of the port, the origins of scouse and the social geographies that developed as a result. Place conjures up and produces a sense of locality, familiarity and shared experience, as well as the capacity to imagine oneself as part of a community, to imagine oneself as of a particular kind, as Liverpudlian (Anderson, 1991 [1983]).

Mapped onto place, while simultaneously helping to constitute it, is the immediately aural character of the scouse accent. Denise explains, in the excerpt below, how the scouse accent carries widely recognized connotations of class and assumptions of the moral and social character of the speaker:

I would say I came from Liverpool, but I'm not a Scouser. No, because I've lived in different places and I think a lot of people see the word 'scouse' negatively, so I'm not a Scouser – to me, a Scouser is someone from Scottie Road, like a 'Cockney' is someone born within the Bow Bells ... I don't understand where the word 'Scouser' came from, so to me it's how you talk and I don't see myself as talking 'common' if you like – I've got an uncle who was from Scottie Road and I struggled to understand what he'd say sometimes, so to me he was a Scouser and I wasn't. (Denise, aged 40, single parent and volunteer at her local resource centre)

Scouse identities mediate the ways in which Liverpudlians negotiate the familiar and the unfamiliar. A shorthand for the working class of generations past, scouse has become as much a moral category as a cultural one. People are intimately aware of its potency, especially in its capacity to draw out the assumptions and stereotypes of others. For Kieran, a local teenager, this means he will invoke or deny his scouse identity as the situation and context requires:

Yeah, well, I used to say Liverpudlian, but sometimes I would say Scouser probably... I would probably say both... it depends... I would probably be more inclined to say a Liverpudlian depending on who I spoke to. (Kieran, aged 16, sixth form student, son of Anthony)

This gradual alignment of categories to food is well documented in sociology (Mennell, 1996; Tomlinson and Warde, 1993; Warde, 1997) as ways of cooking become woven into the mythology and identity of nations, classes and religious groups (Mennell, 1996). Such alignments provide us, as social members, with the capacity to locate ourselves within narratives beyond our making – those of family, community, history and nation – as well as with resources, in constructing narratives of the self (Somers, 1994). Food is not simply a matter of sustenance or materiality, it is also rich in its capacity to convey meaning (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979). Thus food can be used to secure reciprocal bonds, foster alliances and form an integral part of ritual (Sutton, 2001). It can signify continuity with tradition and the past (Barthes, 1975), and, as is the case with scouse, it can mark social relationships and affirm the boundaries of different forms of inclusion and exclusion (Caplan, 1997).

This link between food and identity endures as an embedded practice within everyday social life (Bourdieu, 1990), as 'ways of doing' purchasing, preparing, cooking, eating and so on. Food practices are often characterized by specificity and particularity, meaning and value, linked to locally acquired practice and technique, '... "just the way they would do it", using the same ingredients, cooking techniques, pans, even cooking fuel that would be used by a cook who is an insider to the culinary tradition' (Heldke, 2005: 387). 'Ways of doing' become richly associated with region, population, locality, community, nation and so on. The preparation of rice, for example, by the Geechees of Southern California, descendants of African captives, involved a fastidious ritual of scrubbing the grain (changing the water up to ten times), boiling, but *never* stirring, and steaming until each kernel could stand on its own (Dash, 1997). The fact that people in France and Italy eat bread every day does not make it mundane or trivial; 'how bread tastes, how the dough is prepared and baked, are subjects of sufficient familiarity and importance to be the basis of discourse' (Mintz, 1996: 97). Food acquires its authenticity from the routines and practices which underpin it, bestowing some quintessential character and forming part of what can be verified as native, local, indigenous: that which links taste and smell to memory and nostalgia (Heldke, 2005; Howes, 2005; Sutton, 2001). In this sense, the practices of food consumption produce a form of local knowledge, a local 'taste' or what the French refer to as *'goût du terroir'* (Trubek, 2005: 268).

Scouse: Improvised and Contingent

Despite its resonance, scouse, however, cannot be treated like a cultural artefact in the same ways as other foods might be. It is not born of the senses (Howes, 2005). What makes scouse a potent cultural symbol for Liverpool is not its

taste, content, or mode of preparation. It is not its faithful adherence to ways of making, cooking or eating, but the very lack thereof. Instead, it is characterized by its utility, its capacity to be made for little, to feed many, its communal and easily improvised character. Scouse is not a sensuous dish; indeed, in times of poverty it was, as many locals commented, utilitarian, repetitive, unimaginative, compulsory and boring. The lack of adherence to recipe or method is illustrated in the following extracts:

It would be mutton if I could get a little bit of mutton, beef, a nice big onion, a couple of carrots and potatoes (and the potatoes had to be King Edwards, so it would boil and thicken) and throw a couple of 'Oxos'¹ in. (Susan, aged 96, widow of factory worker who manufactured bobbins)

I use mince and stewing steak and not lamb ... I put barley in mine to thicken it up, something different to maybe other people... I think everybody had a different way of doing it because originally it was like an Irish stew and over the years it's all got mixed up, you know, scouse and Irish stew... I remember asking someone from Leeds and she said 'Oh I didn't think much of it, it was made with corned beef.' (Joy, aged 60, widowed pensioner and former factory worker)

I only make my scouse with beef, a lot of people put lamb in, or it used to be mutton years ago, but I've never used lamb. My mother used to make a lot of 'neck-end soup' with lamb, so that was like scouse ... oxtail soup, liver and onions in the oven. Now I've never been able to get the liver and onions like my mother used to make. (Margaret, aged 71, widow of self-employed roofer)

Scouse is defined by its practicality and endless variations. Its diverse cultural origins and uses have made it a hybrid, a melange of ingredients that has its roots primarily in Scandinavia, but is well known to people throughout Merseyside, Wales and Lancashire. Meaning and identity are, therefore, given by those who consume it, who have attributed a sense of 'scouseness' to this dish.

The durability of scouse over the years owes much to its practical significance within family and community life, its *ad hoc* improvised character and the ability to make it up as required in times of need. Scouse conjures past memories of family meals, weddings and funeral wakes:

I do it the same way as me dad... erm... because me dad used to be on shifts, so while me mum was at work me dad would cook the scouse and me dad would show me how to do it, you know, your fat, your flour, you fry this, you add this and this and let it 'fall', so I think I cook it more like me dad cooks it because I put herbs in it. Now me mum would just put carrot and turnip in, maybe a bit of barley. (Katherine, aged 40, former factory worker, now community development worker)

My dad liked using braising steak because he liked steak, but me mum liked using lamb, but I think there was a scare or something and me mum started using braising steak, but I know that traditionally scouse was made with mutton and mutton's tough, but when it's cooked with a scouse it just crumbles. (John, aged 57, electrician)

Stories of meals past are key to remembering and replicating the culture of food, or more precisely the broad culture within which food is embedded. Scouse

is routine, often eaten weekly, fundamental to the reproduction of family life. Unlike the routine cooking of other meals, scouse is less of a gendered concern. People recall the different ways in which their fathers and mothers prepared the dish with equal facility.

However, in the current climate of urban development and cultural revival, food as heritage is not just something casually passed on between the members of a family or community, but has been reconstructed as a 'value-added industry' as cities regenerate (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). 'Heritage' repackages the local for export, presenting new definitions of what is real, authentic and unchanging in cityscapes undergoing significant change – a process exemplified in Liverpool's Capital of Culture year.

Scouse Regenerated: The 'New' and the 'Improved'

Five years ago, scouse rarely featured in Liverpool's eateries. One writer expressed bewilderment at why no enterprising Liverpool businessman had produced tinned scouse in an attempt to entice the exile or tourist (Shaw, 1988). Since 2007, *Maggie May's*, a local family business with a city-centre cafe, has done just that, making the decision to have their old family recipe canned for sale and



Figure 1 'Original Maggie May's Scouse'. Picture taken on Wednesday, 19 September 2007, by Pat Neill. Permission to reproduce this image granted by *Maggie May's Restaurant*

distribution. They did this in direct response to the Capital of Culture in the hope that it would place scouse, as a regional food, 'on the map'. *Maggie May's* tinned scouse can be found, among other places, in the Liverpool tourist information office, where in 2008 it was sold alongside Capital of Culture tea-towels and Liverpool souvenirs, including the ubiquitous Beatles and soccer memorabilia.

This was not an isolated venture. A website promoting 'what to do' in Liverpool recently ran a feature on scouse, declaring that the dish was enjoying a comeback, and reviewed *Maggie May's* alongside two other restaurants, *Thomas Rigby's* and *Malmaison*, which were also serving scouse. Reflecting scouse's symbolic value as *the* dish of Liverpool as well as its easy-to-improvise character, scouse is never the same dish from one restaurant to another, varying in terms of ingredients, preparation and cost and ranging from £3.95 in some eateries to £10.95 in others (LiverpoolConfidential.com, 2007). Hope Street, the route linking both the city's Anglican and Catholic Cathedrals, is home to a number of well established restaurants and cafes. In 2008, the *Everyman* bistro began to advertise their 'famous *Everyman* scouse', a trend followed by the nearby cafe at the Catholic Cathedral and *The Casa*, a local trade unionist bar opened by the Liverpool dockers. Further up Hope Street, some of the more up-market restaurants marketed 'Posh Scouse' and 'Executive Scouse' as



Figure 2 The *Scouse House*. Reproduced by permission of Mr. Anthony Zausmer

alternatives to the more traditional 'Lobscouse' sold in cafes and pubs. Perhaps the most intriguing incarnation was that devised by the head chef at the *Crowne Plaza Hotel* who, inspired by Liverpool Football Club's European cup win in 2005, created 'Rafa-lution Scouse', named after Liverpool's manager, Rafa Benitez. This was the most expensive plate of scouse we have found thus far, which, at £25 per plate, comprised finest fillet of lamb, chorizo sausage and sun-dried tomatoes, baby carrots, turnips, shallots and saffron potatoes.

It would be misleading to suggest, however, that scouse was seen in the same way by all those selling the Capital of Culture. Scouse appeared variously as a commodity, a novelty, an event, an assertion of local identity, and a tourist attraction. Moreover, scouse was not universally embraced. The Merseyside Partnership, moving against the trend, announced a competition for local chefs to create a more sophisticated, less provincial signature dish for 2008, setting up a symbolic contest between the old and new in the drive to rebrand and regenerate Liverpool (*Liverpool Echo*, 2008). In response, 2008 saw the opening of the *Scouse House*, a new cafe in Birkenhead across the Mersey from Liverpool's city centre, devoted to traditional Liverpudlian food. In criticizing the competition, the chef and manager of the *Scouse House* said:

What kind of world is it when it appears that they want to turn us all into a load of southern jessies? ... I think they are missing the point ... Liverpool is surely a great city largely because of its respect for tradition – values and team loyalty handed down from one generation to the next. To talk about replacing scouse with something more modern is akin to throwing the baby out with the bath water. (Anthony Zausmer, quoted in *Liverpool Daily Post*, 23 April 2008)

Alongside traditional scouse made from mutton, the cafe sells Blind Scouse for vegetarians, and its own creation, the Liver Bird or Blonde Scouse, for the non-red-meat eater, all of which are served in thick sliced 'Dockers' Butties'. That these versions, which self-consciously lay claim to tradition, are also modernizations is itself revealing of the complex ways in which identifications retain coherence amid the push and pull of social and economic change.

The revival of scouse has assumed a range of forms and demonstrates that the ways in which local food is commodified are far from uniform. This is not just the absorption of the local by de-localized capital; it also underlines the fact that culture and tradition are resources that local people draw upon in order to reposition *themselves* within market-driven processes of change (Appadurai, 1986). It is not the selling of culture *per se* which is a problem for local people, but which version one is attempting to promote and on whose terms. As the sections below further attest, disassociation from the selling of culture can itself become a way of selling culture.

Putting Authenticity on Display

Saturday, 10 January 2009, was the last night of Capital of Culture. To mark the event, Liverpool's town hall hosted an open occasion. Scouse was served to

the public accompanied by red cabbage, beetroot, a bread roll and a cup of tea. Commenting on the variations of scouse served in the city during the past year, the banqueting manager explained the decision to offer 'traditional' scouse as follows:

You invite more criticism from local people if you try to make it something it is not. Traditional scouse generates more positive feedback from both visitors and local people. Either do something well, the traditional way, the way it's supposed to be, or not at all, whether it is for Capital of Culture or anything else. (Stephen Gibbs, Assistant Head of the Lord Mayor's Office)

While many newer restaurants marketed scouse to draw cosmopolitan clientele brought in by the Capital of Culture, some of the city's older establishments, who have served the dish for generations, have explained their selling scouse as a means to assert the local and traditional in opposition to the new and artificial, particularly in relation to the city's expanding cosmopolitan quarters and chic new eateries. One cafe owner with a small establishment off one of the city's main thoroughfares explained that the traditional bowl of scouse counterbalances the superficiality of urban development as an attempt to hold on to the 'old' food that Scousers 'feel more at home with'. 'This', she says, 'is the historical dish of "the great unwashed" and a kick against the shallowness of regeneration'. On similar grounds, many local diners greeted the more expensive and 'posher' versions of scouse with amusement and sometimes derision:

[O]h for God's sake... that's not scouse, that's like that beef 'boolong' they make with wine... we'd never eat scouse like that. (Susan, aged 96, widow of factory worker who manufactured bobbins)

The reintroduction of scouse to the city centre – it's a marketing ploy ... it's how you sell an identity. (Anthony, aged 37, a draughtsman from Stoneycroft, Liverpool)

A representative from the 'Local Food First Project',² supported under the England Rural Development Programme, explained from his perspective that the revival of dishes such as scouse 'has come from a general move back to "proper", authentic, traditional and wholesome food as part of wider regeneration efforts'. Such a move has certainly helped translate scouse into a new kind of 'culinary cultural capital'. However, as in other regenerating cities, particularly Cardiff, it is often the local indigenous communities who have been the loudest critics of developments which failed to take their needs and experience into consideration, too often reasserting the boundaries of social exclusion in preference for new cosmopolitan 'enclaves' (Thomas, 2004). However, what is not clearly articulated in recent theorizing is that these critiques are themselves vehicles that allow locals to take advantage of the markets opened up by the regeneration process.

Food regeneration is contentious and open to multiple interpretations. In one sense, it can be interpreted as a process of neo-localism: a recycling of traditional symbols, to be commodified by local elites through heritage tourism and city development (Shortridge and Shortridge, 1998). Leitch has discussed this in relation to the Italian dish 'lardo', understanding its regeneration as a trend towards the commodification of the food of the poor as an 'ironic marker

of a global economy concerned as much with the production of signs, memories and images as it is with the production of distinct objects and commodities' (Leitch, 2000: 105). Other commentators see this return to the traditional and local as a comforting repetition of the past, a continuation of a domestic tradition that is uniquely 'of a place' in an attempt to drive a new 'strategy of belonging' (Abercrombie, 2004). Yet, for others it demonstrates that cities have fallen short of pluralism and innovation, remaining characterized by what they were rather than having reinvented themselves (Munck, 2003), while there are those who contend that persistence of the local works to counter the homogenizing effects of globalization and the creation of replicated geographies or 'McWorlds' (Bell and Valentine, 1997). What we have attempted to show in this article is that these claims and counter-claims, appropriations and re-appropriations, are all part of the contestation of what regeneration means, a process in which local people are crucial participants. Scouse as food and icon is an important resource that those who wish to reassess, reclaim, reassert or even remake local identities can put to work in many different, often highly creative ways.

We should be cautious in positing simplistic distinctions between the old and the new, the authentic and the fake, or in fetishizing consumption practices the necessity of which many working class urban dwellers may be all too glad to escape. In our view, we are less concerned with the relative merits of one interpretation over another, than with the ways in which these culinary objects come to be invested with such different 'strategies of meaning' (Kopytoff, 1986), and to understand how these strategies make manifest the vested interests of different social actors. Social objects are, after all, only as meaningful or symbolic as their uses allow. In the case of regeneration, the consumption practices of local foods open up an important empirical area of contestation that shows urban developments are not simply the result of market forces or competition between social actors, but the product of complex chains of human action and meaning-making.

Conclusion

In tracing its social life we have argued that scouse remains a presence in a city characterized by social and cultural diversity and change. However, its character and capacity to connote the local everyday worlds of Liverpool's more traditional communities have altered substantially in meaning and practice. While scouse could always be purchased as a reasonably priced dish in local pubs and restaurants throughout Merseyside, the number of establishments selling scouse has rapidly increased. Of particular note is its popularity as a new culinary speciality for the city's more expensive restaurants, albeit a dish that differs substantially in ingredients, preparations and price. One might argue that this commodification of scouse to satisfy a new set of elitist desires conforms precisely to the *ad hoc* and utilitarian character of the dish: the capacity to make it up as needed. Nevertheless, this has provoked contestation from locals in that what is offered on the menus of exclusive restaurants and bars is *not* scouse, but simply the

marketing of an identity devoid of the practices which underpin it: those routine, face-to-face encounters, ‘collaborations of hands’ (Goffman, 1963), shared understandings, and social experiences that come to be extensively contextualized through food (Hannerz, 1992). Here again we can see how scouse is used to mark and patrol boundaries, with, in this case, ‘real’ Scousers drawing on their identities to challenge the more recent transformations of scouse into a more static culinary-cultural artefact (Klamer, 2003). What perhaps these contestations and the territory being contested show is how scouse, a meal defined by ingredients-to-hand, ‘necessity in a bowl’, has operated and continues to operate as an empty signifier (Barthes, 1970) – a vessel betraying the particular ties of place and culture for those Liverpooldians who attempt to fill it with deeper meaning.

The commodification of this dish can be seen to reflect broadly similar processes across many other regenerating cities where cultural heritages and local produce have been used in place-marketing, offering the local for sale in what have been seen as de-localized processes of production and consumption. These have in turn been directed at the tourist and the economically privileged, leading to a flattening out of indigenous practices which has little to do with the people of the city and more to do with non-domiciled consumers with few ties to what they are consuming. In its origins and histories, scouse may be seen to reflect the ‘world in one city’, but its marketing glosses the distinctions which otherwise characterize the embedded value of this dish to Liverpooldians. The danger is that the generic respecification of scouse reflects a reassigning of culture from above while constraining its complex social and community character. However, we must avoid knitting an overly simplistic regeneration narrative by assuming that the local will inevitably dissipate in globalized market forces. Culture-driven regeneration is a complex, multi-sided process. Perhaps, as theorists, we have been too quick to concentrate on one side, instead of looking at the fields of contestation within which the local and the non-local are constantly being reappraised and repositioned relative to one another.

Notes

- 1 ‘Oxo’ is a British brand of freeze-dried meat stock, which comes in small cubes and is used to make soups, stews and sauces.
- 2 The Local Food First Project, now re-named Food Northwest, is a ‘strategic body’ representing the Northwest Food and Drink Industry supported by the North West Development Agency. One of its key objectives is to ‘strengthen’ the identity of regional food in a national and international context and encourage co-operation with the tourism sector to produce ‘tailored’ foods.

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Ciara Kierans

Ciara Kierans PhD is a cultural anthropologist working in the Division of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine at The University of Liverpool. Her PhD, awarded in 1997, focused on the lived experiences of end stage renal failure and transplantation in Ireland. She took up a Fulbright fellowship in 2001, attending Harvard University to continue work on exploring issues of culture and embodiment in transplant technologies. She has since conducted a range of qualitative studies on chronic conditions, new medical and information and communication technologies, gender and health, urban communities, urban regeneration and health. Much of her work reflects both ethnographic and narrative perspectives. Now lecturing in The University of Liverpool, and as Director of Postgraduate Studies in the School of Population, Community and Behavioural Sciences, she runs a research programme supporting postgraduate research students titled: Researching Medicine, Health and Society: Advanced Approaches to Qualitative Research.

Address: Division of Public Health, School of Population, Community and Behavioural Sciences, The Whelan Building, The University of Liverpool, L69 3GB, UK.

Email: c.kierans@liv.ac.uk

Jane Haeney

Jane Haeney has recently completed her PhD titled 'Culture, Food Memory and Health and Intergenerational Study in Liverpool'. This research focuses on local memories of food as they are embedded in community and family everyday life and practices and draws out a series of implications for health and food choices. Jane's interests lie mainly in the subject of food and food ways in traditional urban communities. She is based in Liverpool and teaches on ethnographic and qualitative research methods at the Centre for Tourism, Consumer and Food Studies in Liverpool, JMU.

Address: Centre for Consumer and Food Studies, Liverpool, John Moores University, I.M. Marsh Campus, Liverpool L17 6BD, UK.

Email: J.G.haeney@2004.ljmu.ac.uk