

Heritage in danger or mission accomplished? Diverging accounts of endangerment, conservation and 'heritage' vegetables in print and online

Food, Culture and Society

Abigail Wincott,

University of Brighton

a.wincott@brighton.ac.uk

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Food Culture and Society, Dec 2015 (vol 18 issue 5, 569-588) available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15528014.2015.1088190>

Abstract

They are colourful and tasty. They are discarded by agri-business and free to swap and share. For these and many other reasons, the idea of 'heritage' vegetables has been mobilised by diverse groups in the UK in recent years to critique and re-imagine industrial food production systems. However, from activist leaflets to gardening advice, claims about the value of heritage foods are rarely subject to critical scrutiny. Using existing work on the uses of heritage discourse in ancient monuments as a starting point, this article explores some of the ways heritage vegetable narratives can frame food heritage in ways that imply not only different conceptions of value, but different models of custodianship and access to heritage resources. The focus here is on the way three interest groups structure the story of 'heritage in danger' in two radically different ways with regards to the passage of time. Using a discourse theoretical approach, I explore how a range of institutions and campaign groups use a linear model of time to paint a picture of catastrophic loss of diversity, which threatens the future of humankind. Meanwhile a narrative model commonly employed by writers of lifestyle media texts suggests the time of loss has been superseded by a new golden age of consumer-driven abundance and taste.

Key words: Alternative food, heritage, heirloom, seed saving.

Introduction: the emergence of 'heritage' as a challenge to industrial food

Modern food production systems have resulted in a dramatic and ongoing loss of genetic diversity in plant crops globally, as more and more of what we eat comes from fewer, and more genetically uniform, modern cultivars (Hammer and Teklu 2008; FAO 2010: xix). Agricultural modernisation has also resulted in the ongoing privatisation of genetic resources by multinational corporations, through gene patents and plant breeder's rights (Louwaars 2011: 15). Modern varieties are often hybrids, produced under highly specialised conditions. Even without the application of intellectual property rights, they cannot be reproduced in the field, unlike traditional types, so must be purchased anew each year (FAO 1996: 15; Osman and Chable 2011), making growers dependent on seed companies. Modern crop varieties tend to perform well only with high inputs of water, fertilisers and pesticides, unlike traditional farm-bred varieties which are suited to local conditions and low-input farming methods (Negri, Maxted and Veteläinen 2009: 15). Dependence on large quantities of fertiliser and pesticides also binds farmers to the bio-tech giants who produce these too. The erosion of genetic diversity is also paralleled by a loss of local foods and local food cultures (Negri, Maxted and Veteläinen 2009: 3).

In response to this growing sense of urgent threat to food genes, food cultures and food freedoms posed by industrialised food production systems, a number of 'alternative' food projects have grown up in recent decades, in Britain as in many countries, including organic, Slow Food, the revival of regional cuisine, and farmers' markets and veg box schemes. This paper's focus is on one of the discourses which presents a critique of and alternative to industrial food production: the conservation of heritage vegetables.

Discourses of heritage vegetables and other traditional crops have taken various forms in different parts of the world, where the agricultural, political, cultural and social conditions which give rise to them differ. In the US, a wealth of home-bred vegetable varieties has been handed down within families (Ashworth, 2002; Jabs, 1984, Veteto 2008). These backyard 'heirlooms' have been the focus of conservation efforts, and they have moved from private gardens to special spaces of luxury consumption, such as high-end restaurants, health food stores and farmers' markets. At the same time, their representation in media texts has changed, as it has moved from largely specialist environmentalist publications to restaurant reviews and lifestyle sections of the general press (Jordan, 2007). In India, traditional farmers' varieties are still a major part of commercial agriculture. Following sustained campaigns focused on the perceived incursion of western biotech companies, legislation has been enacted to allow farmers or communities to register these traditional varieties (Saxena and Singh 2006). The UK, in contrast, perhaps due to early industrialisation, has retained very few traditional crop varieties (DEFRA 2009: 11), in professional agriculture, at least. Only recently has there been a huge growth in heritage fruit and vegetable cultivation. The Biodynamic Association and the Soil Association have both recently launched initiatives to preserve and use traditional varieties for new seed breeding programmes (Biodynamic Association 2015; Soil Association 2015), and heritage vegetables are increasingly available in shops and restaurants. At present however, most traditional varieties are grown in home-gardens and allotments. This means that, at present, heritage fruit and vegetable discourse is largely a consumer and lifestyle discourse in the UK. In spite of this, its study has been restricted to the agricultural sciences¹.

The study of heritage vegetables is certainly well established within crop science. However, agricultural scientists are major social actors in the discourse, their work closely related to the storage of genetic resources in closed seed banks, to be used in professional crop breeding programmes within industrial agriculture. As Nazarea has noted, The scientific community has succeeded in calling attention to the problem of genetic diversity loss, and the need to act, but their discursive positioning of the issues and solutions has led to recognition of state authority over indigenous community resources and the conservation and commodification of them (2005: 120). Scientific studies do not generally critically examine the work of the discourse of conservation itself, though there have been interventions from and collaborations with small numbers of sociologists and anthropologists (see, for example, Friis-Hansen and Sthapit 2000; Nazarea 2005). These approaches are in the area of agricultural production, rather than consumer culture though. The roles of scientific conservation institutions need to be critically examined, and seen in their particular social context in contemporary Britain. Here, they sit alongside the activities of other social actors, such as supermarkets, heritage bodies, TV chefs and anti-capitalist campaigners, whose work has also not been scrutinised to date.

In popular texts, discourses of food heritage are rarely subjected to critical evaluation. From gardening advice to restaurant reviews, assertions by various interest groups are taken at face value. The growing and eating of heritage varieties is presented as a form of resistance to industrial food and its problems – the privatisation of resources by corporations, environmental damage and loss of diversity. But heritage discourse is not neutral. Through discursive activity,

¹ For those readers who would like to know more about heritage vegetables themselves - and their collectors - there are a number of books for a general audience, such as Carolyn Jabs' *The Heirloom Gardener*, Diane Ott Whealy's *Gathering: Memoir of a Seed Saver*, Christopher Stocks' *Forgotten Fruits* or Toby Musgrave's *Heritage Fruit and Vegetables*.

claims are staked (Wacquant 2013: 276) and forms of knowledge about the world are privileged (Foucault 1970, 1972, 1977). While the saving of heritage vegetables may be seen as a movement in opposition to the corporate privatisation of food, there is still ample opportunity for privatisation, enclosure and commodification within the discourse of seed heritage itself. There is also opportunity for resistance, through the saving and swapping of seed for free, and for individuals to play a role in the regeneration of crop diversity. As such the terrain of British heritage food discourse is highly varied, its meanings unstable and control of resources far from fixed.

Alternative food movements in the field of food studies

The multi-disciplinary field of food studies has in recent years paid a great deal of attention to several 'alternative' food projects. This includes work on Slow Food (Parkins and Craig 2006), Fair Trade (Goodman 2004; Lyon 2006), farmer's markets (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; Trobe 2001) and organic food (Guthman 2003, 2004). Alternative food discourses are varied, they intervene at variously the sites of production, processing, distribution and consumption, but they are underpinned by an apparently widespread dissatisfaction with an interrelated set of effects produced by the industrialisation of food systems (Jackson, Ward and Russell 2009: 16; Kneafsey et al. 2008: 1; Maye, Goodman and Holloway 2010: 1790) as indicated above. I would argue that they are also connected by reference to the past, either explicitly, as in the case of heritage conservation, or implicitly by virtue of the fact that it is modern changes to food production and consumption which are problematized. Indeed reference to the past has been noted in several studies. The Consumer Culture in an Age of Anxiety project (Jackson et al. 2009) interviewed consumers and producers and found that ideas about good and bad food are frequently articulated through the idea of remembering and forgetting past food knowledge and taste. Parkins and Craig interpret ethical living as a reclaiming of past ways of living, in the face of increasing acceleration of modern life (Parkins and Craig 2011). And Bramall recommends more attention be paid to the ways historical resources may shape consumer imaginaries about current and future food provisioning (2011, 2013).

The association of the past to alternative food imaginaries requires some unpacking. Concerns have frequently been raised about the negative effects of looking to the past, which would suggest critical examination of their uses in food discourses is due. For some, popular uses of the past, such as re-use of the wartime Dig for Victory motif or ration-book chic, are simply inaccurate (Bramall 2013). For the critics, history is the rigorous pursuit of accurate knowledge about the past, while refuge in nostalgia or heritage is merely a comfort and moreover one based on visions of a past as it never was (Hewison 1987).

There is now an emerging body of work which has examined themes from the past in the popular culture of food (Bramall 2011, 2013; Crouch and Parker 2003; Jackson et al. 2009; Jordan 2007, 2010; Thomas 2008). The particular forms these uses of the past take are though potentially rather different, and we cannot assume they are doing same discursive work. Historical knowledge, nostalgic themes and heritage, for example, represent different relationships with the past. Heritage is particular in its focus on saving material remnants of the past, though heritage discourses may also be nostalgic or incorporate historical knowledge about past foodways. In spite of the importance of reference to the past, and the increasingly high profile of heritage vegetables in popular culture in the UK, heritage discourses themselves have received little academic attention to date in cultural approaches to food.

Exceptions include Crouch and Parker's 2003 paper on groups using 'heritage' to challenge dominant ideas about land use and promote alternative futures. For example, land reform group TLIO has drawn on the heritage of the 17th century Diggers movement to legitimise radical ideas about political and economic reform, as well as borrowing imagery from the WWII Dig for Victory campaign. The recent AHRC-funded Cultural Values of Digging project examined the uses of historic themes and the heritagization of Digging in a wartime kitchen garden and the Wigan Winstanley festival celebrating the Diggers Movement (Rivlin 2014),

though heritage and history are not distinguished. In the US, Jordan has examined the heirloom tomato's move from environmentalist-alternative to mainstream consumerist spaces (2007) and Carolan has examined the normative work of conservation discourse at the Seed Savers Exchange (2007). These are all small projects, examining different kinds of food heritage activity. It's still too early to say what it is that is special to heritage as a discourse when it's applied to food, how it might differ from other kinds of alternative food discourse and there is a complete lack of empirical work on heritage vegetable discourses in the UK context, in spite of its increasing popularity and visibility here in the last few years.

In this article I offer a small contribution to that work of unpacking the use of a central heritage narrative in British heritage food talk. I will consider some of the assumptions underlying common framings of heritage endangerment and conservation, and the ways these are being used to make certain claims on heritage resources, by a range of social actors. In doing this, I draw on a body of work where the uses and effects of heritagization have been more thoroughly explored: critical heritage literature from the fields of heritage management and tourism.

Seeds, fruit and vegetable are produced as 'heritage' through a particular common narrative framework. This framework stresses the way that these resources have been handed down by ancestors, highlights their current destruction or squandering, and proposes custodianship of them, on behalf of future generations. This narrative framework is recognisably that of modern Western heritage discourse (Lowenthal and Binney 1981; Samuel 1994: 140; Smith 2006), which is well theorised insofar as it concerns built heritage and ancient monuments

The heritage literature: authorising the remains of the past

The Western concept of heritage has long been fuelled by a sense of endangerment and loss, or what Raphael Samuel memorably describes as 'the vertiginous sense of disappearing worlds'. Efforts by the guardians of heritage, be that stately homes or folk songs, 'have been sustained by the belief that, whatever their achievements, they are fighting a losing battle against the erosion of time' (Samuel 1994: 150). Words like vanishing, erosion, disappearance and loss recur frequently in texts dealing with heritage vegetables, including those discussed here. The sense of imminent loss is perhaps particularly acute because of the way Western heritage discourse privileges 'authentic' material remains rather than practices and traditions (Smith 2006). This focus on material authenticity has been inextricably linked to the creation of a class of heritage experts who are empowered, through Western heritage discourse, to make judgements about which buildings and sites are 'authentic' heritage and how they are to be conserved ('authorized heritage discourse', to use Laurajane Smith's term, 2006).

Western heritage discourse has been instrumental in creating and sustaining identities such as 'member of the public' and a range of expert heritage professions (Smith 2006; Samuel 1994). The latter are enabled, through the discourse, to authorise and manage heritage remains, and control access to heritage resources. The former may be permitted to visit those remains, but not to alter them. The particular emphasis, in modern Western heritage, on the conservation of material remains from the past, has been shown to be important in the negotiation of these power relations and in enabling the policing of access to and work with heritage remains, leaving many groups disenfranchised with regards to the traditions, sites and remains of their ancestors (Smith 2006).

There are a number of ways in which this heritage literature cannot adequately explain discourses of heritage as they move away from the durable materials of monuments and historic homes. The range of social actors engaged in heritage fruit and vegetable conservation is large and very varied in the UK. While it includes some of the same heritage bodies which care for ancient monuments, such as the National Trust, there are also other kinds of interest group, as indicated above. The practice of power over heritage resources is therefore more diffuse. Food heritage is done in a range of places, some of which are not at

all like those of monumental heritage: in home gardens, kitchens and retail spaces, as well as the virtual spaces of catalogues, websites and magazines.

Because of their different material qualities, unlike castles and monuments, seeds and plants are infinitely reproducible. This raises questions of how authenticity is understood in relation to this form of heritage. Copies of heritage monuments and art works are understood to be potentially inauthentic, although they can become heritage artefacts in their own right, they are not understood to be the same as the original (Cohen 1988). Such distinctions are not appropriate when we conserve plants.

Heritage vegetable discourse: theoretical framework and research design

My analysis of heritage vegetable conservation is informed by an idea of discourse drawn from the writing of Foucault (1970, 1972) and Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (2001). That is to say thinking of discourse as enacted through language certainly, but also other social practices and the contexts in which they take shape. Discourse analysis offers a way to open up to scrutiny the discursive work performed by the particular conceptual framework of 'heritage' as an alternative food discourse. Initially, in order to address the lack of knowledge about the field of heritage vegetable discourse in the UK, the project began with a mapping of the network of actors and key themes.

I collated a corpus of around 400 texts about heritage vegetables. They were gathered through online searches for books, websites, blogs and news articles as well as databases of academic publications. I visited garden centres and photographed displays of heritage plants and seeds. While at the supermarket I stopped to photograph packets of heritage potatoes and friends sent me menus featuring heritage vegetable dishes.

The individuals and organisations producing such texts are numerous but they fall into broad categories as follows: heritage conservation bodies (such as the National Trust and the Heritage Seed Library); activist groups (for example, Reclaim the Fields); lifestyle journalists and experts; seed catalogues and garden centres, those selling heritage vegetables and fruit as luxury or premium food (these include restaurants and supermarkets' selling heritage vegetables and fruit in their luxury food ranges) and academics studying traditional crops, the majority of whom are working in agricultural science. There is naturally some overlap between the membership and activities of these bodies, and I do not make any claims for these categories as universally applicable. However, the mapping of the field of actors is successful in giving an indication of how broad the range of activity is, stretching from anti-capitalist agitation to fine-dining and it throws up some interesting questions about the role of mainstreaming and different models of funding. Because the project takes texts produced about vegetable heritage as its primary materials, the consumer or different categories of consumer are notably absent from this map, as are those who grow or save heritage seeds in a private capacity. These are however implied by the texts and will be considered in the analysis.

I annotated texts as I collected them, highlighting common motifs or framings. I produced a total of 25 such themes, though again, I make so argument that this can be an exhaustive list. Themes include:

- Apocalyptic: predictions of widespread starvation and environmental devastation.
- Care-taking: accentuating the labour or effort expended in premium heritage foods.
- Guardianship: reference to the custodianship of heritage.
- Italy/the South: Italy and southern Europe as repositories of food heritage.
- Patriotic: proud reference to vegetables and fruit as British national heritage
- Real: heritage seeds and vegetables as more 'real' than modern types.
- Uniformity-character: the uniformity of industrially produced food contrasted with the characterfulness of heritage vegetables.

In addition to these themes, I also noted two strikingly different ways of structuring the story of endangerment of heritage seeds. Texts produced by campaign groups, heritage conservation bodies and some journalists and writers of popular books tend to employ a 'linear' narrative structure. At the same time, a very different narrative model, which I have nicknamed the 'burgeoning movement' model, is often used in lifestyle media texts, but not seen elsewhere. Examining the characteristics of these two narrative models can make clear not only their differences, but the work that 'heritage' in particular does: the kinds of relationships it produces and the claims it enables certain social actors to make on resources.

The road to destruction: the linear model of heritage

Many texts tell the story of heritage vegetables' decline and the consequences of that loss. These texts include reports by anti-poverty charities, leaflets from anti-capitalist pressure groups and publicity materials from heritage bodies. For example, below I will consider materials by the NGO Practical Action, some of those published by the self-described 'constellation' of activists known as Reclaim the Fields and the UK's largest heritage body, the National Trust. These texts tend to follow the lead of the crop-science literature, in that heritage vegetables are usually framed as an issue of relevance to national and international policy on professional crop breeding and farming, rather than to home gardeners or consumers of processed heritage food products. They structure the story of heritage vegetables in a linear fashion, with a past of balance, abundance and continuity (the heritage), a present, which is a time of vertiginous and unprecedented loss, and many also predict global future disaster if we don't act to safeguard our plant heritage. The vocabulary does a lot of the work here: the current status of heritage vegetables is characterised in these texts by words like 'vanishing', 'disappearing', 'loss', 'eroded', 'extinction', 'endangered' and 'depleted'. We can see this in action if we turn to some leaflets issued by institutions and campaign groups concerned with the endangerment of traditional crops:

[O]ur food culture is becoming impoverished and our plant heritage is disappearing. It's like destroying a plant library that has been accumulated by farmers and growers over thousands of years. (European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources [EPCGR] 2008: 3)

Since the introduction of the seed legislation in the mid-1970s untold hundreds, or even thousands, have been lost. (Heritage Seed Library 2008: 6)

The rate of loss of biodiversity is greater now than at any time in human history. (UK Food Group 2010: 11)

While they owe a debt to crop science's inventories of landraces and measurement of loss of genetic diversity, many of these texts are critical of conventional crop breeding programmes. This criticism is more frequent and tends to be more vehement in its expression in texts produced by activist organisations. The authors of many of the campaigning texts extend the discussion beyond the loss of genetic resources for agricultural development, to encompass a loss of freedoms or rights for those outside the professional crop development sector – particularly small farmers, but sometimes also consumers and home growers. Texts such as Mulvany and Berger's 2002 *Sustaining Agricultural Biodiversity* or the Primal Seeds website assert that there is an unhealthy concentration of power in our food systems by a handful of corporations, aided by the state, which passes laws to ban heritage seeds and protect big plant breeders' rights. Scientific breeding programmes are often implicated in these narratives, for their role in producing high yielding but genetically uniform vegetables plants, including hybrid and genetically modified crops. In this re-telling of the story of crop heritage, scientific breeding works in the service of corporate food production and robs the ordinary person of their inheritance:

We have reached a point where large companies dominate our lives. They are feeding us genetically engineered food. They are selling more poisonous chemicals to spray on the land. They are restricting what types of plants we can sell or even breed. (Untangling ourselves from the monocult, Primal Seeds website)

Regulations make it increasingly difficult for small business owners and individuals to grow seeds for sale or exchange. At this time, the EU seed market legislation is under revision. At the same time, the production and sale of seeds is increasingly controlled by large international companies such as Monsanto. (Reclaim the Seeds 2014 event publicity)

Some anti-capitalist groups and development charities articulate this idea of rights (and their loss) through the term 'food sovereignty', in a conscious challenge to the globalised capitalist system of food production (Branford 2011), including the two texts quoted below. These groups promote a politicized and radical kind of heritage, as we can see in the following quotes. The first is from a report by development NGO Practical Action, calling for the adoption of a treaty on traditional crops, and the second is from anti-capitalist campaign group Reclaim the Fields.

The proposed Treaty, as a strategy against patenting living matter and the creation of monopolies on genetic resources, aims to restore the situation which prevailed for millennia, when the sharing of genetic resources and associated information took place freely, leading to the development of a wide range of agricultural biodiversity. The Treaty has two fundamental principles:

- First, genetic resources are a patrimonial heritage of humanity: they are part of the global commons, a shared legacy and collective responsibility;
- Secondly, genetic resources and the information relating to them cannot be privatised or sold: free access should be sustained. (Mulvany and Berger 2002: 18)

We aim at supporting and encouraging people to stay on the land and go back to the countryside. [...] We are determined to take back the control over our lives. (Reclaim the Fields, Bulletin May 2010: 4)

In these politicised expressions of food heritage, these groups are asserting that the heritage at stake is a heritage of rights - the right to freely grow food from seed as our ancestors did, as well as the material, genetic heritage which these crops represent.

In many of the linear narratives, the past isn't only represented as better, freer, more diverse, but also as unchanging ('the situation which prevailed for millennia', above). References to the length of past continuity could well serve to exacerbate the sense of risk – the notion that this heritage is irreplaceable because it took so long to build. The idea of a stable and unchanging past is extremely important in delivering a simple message about endangerment and the task of restoring or safeguarding. If the past is a time of change itself, that raises the question of why we ought to act to halt change now. It introduces doubt about which parts of the past to conserve, the point at which to freeze the past for preservation. Heritage vegetable texts following the linear model are able to convey a sense of a stable past through many references to continuity with past generations (see for example Heritage Seed Library 2008: 5). That continuity may be a matter of centuries (National Trust 2009: 14), millennia (ECPGR 2008: 3), since prehistory (Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture website) or even since 'the dawn of agriculture, 12,000 years ago' (Mulvany and Berger 2002: 7). Sometimes these seeds are simply 'ancient' (Whitmore 1999: 36). These groups are constructing the past as something monolithic and unchanging, while the present in contrast is characterised as a time of rupture with that legacy.

In this linear model of time I have looked at the past and the present, some of the texts following this linear model include what can only be described as apocalyptic predictions about the future of the planet, as can be seen from the following quote from the Seed Savers' Exchange website:

These resources stand between us and catastrophic starvation on a scale we cannot imagine. In a very real sense, the future of the human race rides on these materials. The line between abundance and disaster is becoming thinner and thinner, and the public is unaware and unconcerned. Must we wait for disaster to be real before we are heard? (Quote from Jack Harlan, expert in crop evolution, Seed Savers' Exchange website)

I have found no such references to future catastrophe in consumer-oriented texts following the 'burgeoning' model.

I mentioned earlier that materiality of heritage was important in securing the status of expert institutions in authorised heritage discourse, but proposed that materiality was more ambiguous in heritage vegetables. If we see that these texts, often written by specialist organisations such as NGOs and heritage conservation bodies, are generally framing this heritage as one of *genes*, we could conclude this is a strategy which serves to secure their role as expert authorisers of heritage. Genes are more clearly *material* heritage, which survives from generation to generation, in spite of the ephemeral nature of the plants themselves. It makes specialist guardianship in seed banks and historic gardens a more logical means of perpetuating vegetable heritage too. Perhaps more significantly, only crop conservation experts are in a position to test and describe the genes of plants and conclude whether a particular variety is distinct and worthy of preserving. It's worth noting that most of these texts, particularly those from the heritage bodies and larger campaign organisations, make a great deal of use of specialist terminology from agricultural science, whereby heritage vegetables are 'plant genetic resources', seeds are 'germplasm' and the more heartfelt 'loss' often becomes 'genetic erosion'. Texts by smaller campaign groups such as adverts for the Reclaim the Seed event of 2014 or the Seed Freedom website, also use formal language and legal terminology, as they discuss restrictions on access to land, and seed saving and selling. It might be that the use of language styles from expert domains seem an appropriate way to challenge perceived power exercised by experts in those fields – the legislators, scientists and corporate law teams of the biotech sector – on their own terms. Nonetheless its effect is a discourse of heritage protection which is authorised and reproduced by experts of one kind or another.

Whether genes or another conception of heritage is proposed, these texts all work hard to establish that we are living in a time of decline, and the decline becomes an issue to be addressed. This is accompanied by proposals to rescue and guard that endangered heritage. Sometimes heritage professionals claim the mantle of guardian for themselves in very straightforward ways:

We're caring for a huge variety of fruit and vegetables that might otherwise be lost forever. (National Trust Appetite for Change report 2009)

DONATE: Your donation will conserve the plants which feed the world, for the benefit of this and every future generation. We are extremely grateful to our many donors and supporters. ('Donate' box, Global Crop Trust website)

Guardianship is also assumed in the creation of professional heritage kitchen gardens at National Trust properties across the UK, where the rest of the population are placed in the position of member of the public, or in the construction of seed banks and seed collections, such as those at the Heritage Seed Library, Kew Royal Botanic Gardens or the John Innes Centre. Here, experts conserve 'accessions' - samples of populations of traditional vegetables, grown away from their traditional locations, outside mainstream food production and outside the gardens and allotments of hobby gardeners, which are becoming perhaps the

last significant vestiges of genetic diversity, outside the system of professional plant breeding or heritage conservation (Bailey, Eyzaguirre and Maggioni 2009).

It's not my intention to 'reveal' these claims as false, or to deny that a reduction in genetic diversity might have consequences for future food production. Rather I want to draw attention to the fact that this is only one way of structuring the story of heritage vegetables, that it is different to the model used in consumer-oriented texts, and that those differences imply different models of conservation and ownership, and different networks of relationships between people eating, growing and conserving these foods.

Top chefs are going wild: the burgeoning movement model

Where activists and conservationists generally use the linear model to produce a fairly feel-bad message for the reader, 'burgeoning movement' articles in the lifestyle media tell the same narrative of endangerment and the need for conservation, but through the use of an alternative model of temporal organisation, one where the past is dealt with cursorily or merely implied, and we are placed in an amalgamated present and future, where the growing of heritage vegetables is a burgeoning movement. There are a number of ways by which this effect can be achieved.

Firstly there is a stress on activity. For example, in one article in food magazine *Delicious* (Low 2008), fans '*are indulging*', 'Grow-your-own addicts and top chefs *are going wild* for them' and 'keen gardeners and discerning chefs *are seeking* out varieties that offer funky new flavours and colours' (my italics). The use of the present continuous is suggestive of continued or repeated activity and places us firmly in an active present, which continues into at least the immediate future. Magazine and newspaper articles also make much use of the present perfect form. For example, in the BBC news website's Magazine section, an article entitled 'The return of heritage fruit and veg varieties' claims 'the outlook for heritage varieties *has changed*.' and they '*have moved* out of the history books and back into vegetable patches, gardens and orchards.' (Briggs and Bardo 2012). The use of the present perfect indicates a development which culminates in a current state - so in this case, heritage vegetables are something which *have been* rescued, which are no longer endangered, in contrast to the linear narratives. Naturally, the full range of verb forms are to be found in all texts collected, but it is the cumulative effect of grammar and vocabulary which serves in these lifestyle texts to produce a sense of activity in the present moment, and a sense of a future already in progress.

And the vocabulary certainly does a great deal of work in suggesting a burgeoning revival of heritage vegetables too, as we can see in the press release from upmarket supermarket Waitrose, 'English to the Core – Waitrose Revives Ancient Apple Varieties' (Waitrose 2009), which links Waitrose to a grand project to 'bring some of England's most historical apples back to life'. The BBC article mentioned above is liberally peppered with words such as 'return', 'comeback' and 'renewed'. This theme of renewal is hardly to be found in texts produced by activists and institutions. In these 'burgeoning movement' texts, a sense of the expansion of this movement to rescue heritage vegetables is also communicated through words like 'increasing', 'growing', 'rising' and so on. The size of that growth is accentuated and a sense of movement or dynamism pervades these texts. A closer examination of one Guardian newspaper article by Environment Editor John Vidal will give a flavour of the burgeoning movement model. Entitled 'Digging in: Britain's green revolution on the home front: Huge rise in home-grown vegetables amid increasing distaste for factory food' (Vidal 2007), the article recounts the increasing appetite among British consumers for growing their own vegetables and in particular for reviving endangered, heritage varieties. In the title alone we read 'rise' and 'increasing'. In the body of the text this idea of expansion is reinforced with statistics ('a 31% increase in the sales of vegetable seeds to householders') and we are told '[a]llotments are teeming' and '[a] myriad of specialist seed clubs has been set up' for those wanting to grow heritage seeds. One expert interviewee is described as the director of the 'rapidly

expanding Real Seed catalogue' - it seems no opportunity is lost to hammer home the message of growth.

As well as increasing size, there is a strong evocation of movement and energy. There is the headline's reference to a revolution of course, and the growing of heritage varieties is frequently referred to as a 'movement' with its connotations of political upheaval. The drivers of the movement are consumers, we learn, demanding change ('the worm is turning'). Support they receive serves to strengthen the momentum: 'Yesterday Prince Charles added his weight to the heritage vegetable seed movement'.

In another article for the same newspaper (Klein 2008), TV gardener Carol Klein likewise celebrates the 'mammoth' expansion of 'the grow-your-own food movement' and the increasing demands of consumers for better (by which she means heritage) vegetables: 'The expansion of seed firms, seed swaps and seed conservation schemes has made inroads into the closed shop of the big seed companies' (Note again the use of the present perfect to show the rescue is already in hand). In this consumer-oriented heritage discourse, the demanding and empowered consumer no longer tolerates the scientifically improved modern vegetable, with its undifferentiated shape and colour and its bland taste:

[T]he tomato has come a long way from its billiard ball days [...] today chefs and consumers expect more and new heritage and heirloom varieties are being cultivated across Britain. (Wyke 2011)

Now the law and consumer attitudes are changing. Open-pollinated and passed down through the generations, 'heritage' or 'heirloom' crops such as the Brighstone bean are making a comeback. 'It results from the fact that people want to grow a variety of flavours that are good for the garden,' says Chris Smith, co-owner of Pennard Plants, which specialises in heritage vegetable seeds. 'They're remembering what their grandparents grew and they want to do the same.' (Briggs and Bardo 2012)

So whereas in the linear model, we saw the past was presented as a time of abundance and variety and the present day as a time of loss, in the burgeoning model, it is as if we have moved forward in time; the time of loss and corporate dominance has become the past and we are emerging into a future of increased taste and choice. It is worth noting too that in these articles it seems that what is regrettable about the decline of traditional varieties is the resulting lack of consumer choice and pleasure, rather than the loss of genetic material of universal and intrinsic value. The idea of access to free seed as a right which we saw in some texts that adopted the linear narrative remains, though it is generally less overtly political in expression.

These burgeoning movement texts are all produced for media outlets which foreground consumption and leisure, rather than, say, environment or general news. The people who produce them include celebrity gardeners and chefs, professional feature journalists and those who write press releases for inclusion in articles written by journalists. This interest group is absent in monumental heritage discourse, and the heritage literature cannot shed light on the particular narrative path taken by producers of lifestyle media. It could be that they are following generic conventions, in order to enable their material to 'fit' and by extension the writer to 'fit' as a competent and relevant media professional. It's also tempting to turn to Bourdieu's concept of the cultural intermediary (1984: 359), as so many have recently in consumption studies (Matthews and Smith Maguire 2014). These authors may be carving out a space for themselves as informants and arbiters of taste, yet that is not enough to explain why an established narrative of heritage in danger is so frequently side-lined in favour of a story about heritage already rescued. For those who produce media content, however, there is a general obligation to be topical, or demonstrate that ideas are up-to-date. Any expert on lifestyle may feel the need to demonstrate their suitability to report on trends for an audience, by showing that they have their finger on the pulse, that their 'news' is at the cutting edge. 'Experts' who cannot demonstrate their value in this way are also less likely to be in print, online and on air. This means, I suggest, that in a mainstream media environment, and particularly in the lifestyle media, where reporting on trends is of central importance, a

narrative of growth and dynamism is better adapted (to borrow a concept from evolutionary biology) than a story of relentless and age-old decline. Grass-roots consumer trends may also give more weight to these stories than the dictats of lifestyle professionals and companies.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have identified two different ways of narrating the story of heritage endangerment and rescue which can shed some light on the work that heritage discourses can do, as they move beyond monuments and historic sites. The central narrative thread of Western heritage discourse is apparent in both, but structured in two competing ways. The one is a narrative of decline and potential catastrophe while the other is a story of flourishing revival. But the differences go beyond a simple distinction between activists drawing attention to the world's problems and the salve to the conscience provided by the optimism of 'alternative' consumerism.

A thematic analysis shows that some tropes are used particularly frequently by some social actors, some rarely or not at all by others. For example, a heritage of taste and sensual pleasure is often stressed in texts produced by lifestyle journalists, but is rarely a feature of those produced by activist groups or institutions. There is, then, a correlation between discursive articulations and interest group. It would be possible to conclude that authors produce texts which merely reflect their own attitudes to heritage food. I would argue rather that these texts not only reflect the interests of these groups, but help bring into being interest groups too. Those groups may pre-date the discourse of heritage vegetables, as with the National Trust, or do work which extends to other areas, as with lifestyle journalists, but in some sense, doing heritage vegetable discourse positions them or repositions them, producing a discursive niche, in which they are able to act, and stabilising that position to some extent. Therefore I argue it is useful to think in terms of discursive categories, which reflect both the textual characteristics and the authoring group which produces them *and is produced by them*. Both interest group and discursive activity should be regarded as indivisible, each produced through a circular relationship, similar to that seen in Smith's 'authorized heritage discourse' (2006), which authorises the experts, who in turn authorise legitimate forms of heritage.

Based on my analysis of these two narrative formations and the key themes they deploy, I propose three discursive categories in UK heritage vegetable discourse: institutional, activist and lifestyle media. The institutional category refers to the discursive activity of expert heritage organisations such as heritage charities and seed banks. Themes identified in texts within this category include drastic loss, a sense of urgency and, at times, apocalyptic predictions about the future of the human race. The heritage is generally framed in this category as a heritage of genes. It is of such universal importance, and under such immediate threat, that it requires immediate expert preservation on behalf of humankind. Implied therefore by this discursive framework is the member of the public, on whose behalf the heritage materials are conserved. Members of the public are not expert authorisers, though they may at times visit the heritage gardens or visitor centres, and within parameters set by the organisation, may also act as 'seed guardian' or purchase seed for their own home growing. The member of the public may also be called on to donate to support the work of these institutions.

In the 'activist' discourse, seed saving is generally framed as a political issue, connected with land rights, legal reform, anti-capitalism or fighting poverty. Again, these texts tend to deploy the linear temporal model and authors in this activist category also tend to focus on production rather than consumption. They talk in terms of a genetic heritage, but question head-on issues of ownership of those genes, a feature which is less frequent in institutional texts. What is at stake is therefore also a heritage of rights to access and share in a common good. Both kinds of author, the institutions and the activists, therefore could be said to advocate a publicly-oriented conception of heritage. Some of these texts, produced by anti-poverty charities,

address an expert activist readership, while others directly call on members of the public to take part in campaigns to save and revive heritage foods and food production practices. However, a few features of this discourse – the expert terminology, for example – produce the authoring groups as experts too, conserving, raising awareness and organising change on behalf of others.

TV and radio programmes, blogs, press releases and articles on the subject of heritage vegetables as a lifestyle or consumer issue are grouped together as ‘lifestyle media’ and produced by lifestyle journalists. Though there are a number of blogs, much of this material is published by large media organisations, many of whom are funded by advertising, such as the broadsheet newspapers. These lifestyle media texts which use the ‘burgeoning movement’ model discussed here propose a rather private or individual kind of heritage, one of taste and enjoyment in the home and garden, in other words they focus on individual consumption, or home production and consumption, rather than professional agriculture. The narrative structure and the themes common to these texts position the consumer as the guardian, the force behind a popular movement which has already achieved a successful revival of the heritage in question. In doing so, this consumerist discourse also produces lifestyle experts, again empowered by the discourse they propagate.

This range of authorised heritage discourses is wider than we have seen to date in the monumental heritage literature and I suggest that the ambiguous materiality of vegetables and fruit is key to understanding this range of discursive articulations. Guardianship and conservation of physical remains from the past is an essential feature of heritage discourse, and what makes it different to other uses of the past in alternative food projects, such as nostalgia or reference to historic precedent. And yet, the materiality of vegetables is unlike the churches or castles of ‘authorized heritage discourse’. No heritage vegetable is a one-off, in fact they are almost infinitely reproducible and may be bought and sold, shared or swapped. The vegetables themselves are conserved yet are also eaten; even the seed is not actually *the same seed* from one year to the next, instead it is generally a new generation, descended from a previous year’s seed. I suggest that it is this ambiguity which affords the related but competing accounts examined in this article. Currently these organisations find the heritage narrative an effective mechanism by which to stake a claim on heritage resources and carve out a role for themselves as expert authorisers, still, it is difficult to imagine a situation where this particular kind of heritage could be so comprehensively enclosed and controlled as built heritage has been over the course of the past 150 years.

Reference list

- Ashworth, S. 2002. *Seed to Seed: Seed saving and growing techniques for vegetable gardeners*. Decorah, Iowa: Seed Savers Exchange.
- Bailey, A., Eyzaguirre, P. and Maggioni, L. (Eds.) 2009. *Crop Genetic Resources in European Home Gardens. Proceedings of a Workshop, 3-4 October 2007, Ljubljana, Slovenia*. Rome: Biodiversity International.
- Biodynamic Association. 2015. *Biodynamic Plant Breeding and Seed Co-operative*. Retrieved 23 February 2015, from <http://www.biodynamic.org.uk/farming-and-gardening/seeds/biodynamic-plant-breeding-and-seed-co-operative/>
- Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Bramall, R. 2011. Dig for victory! Anti-consumerism, austerity and new historical subjectivities. *Subjectivity*, 4(1): 68-86.
- Bramall, R. 2013. The austerity larder: Mapping food systems in a new age of austerity. *Journal of Consumer Culture*. Online at <http://joc.sagepub.com/content/early/recent>.

- Branford, S. 2011. *Food Sovereignty: Reclaiming the Global Food System*. War on Want. Available at <http://www.waronwant.org/attachments/Food%20sovereignty%20report.pdf> (accessed 20 June 2013).
- Briggs, H., and Bardo, M. 2012. The return of heritage fruit and veg varieties. *BBC News Online Magazine*, 3 May. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-17912734> (accessed 11 June 2013).
- Carolan, M. 2007. Saving seeds, saving culture: A case study of a heritage seed bank. *Society and Natural Resources*, 20: 739-750.
- Cohen, E. 1988. Authenticity and commoditization in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 15(3): 371-386.
- Crouch D. and Parker G. 2003. 'Digging-up' utopia? Space, practice and land use heritage. *Geoforum* 34 (3): 395–408.
- DEFRA. 2009. *Country Report on the State of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture: United Kingdom*. London: UN FAO.
- ECPGR. 2008. *A Safety Net for the Future of our Crop Plants*. Leaflet. Available at http://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/fileadmin/www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/PUBLIC_AWARENESS/Brochure_Widerpublic.pdf (accessed 15 August 2013).
- FAO. 1996. *Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*. Rome.
- FAO. 2010. *The Second Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*. Rome.
- Foucault, M. 1970. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1994 ed.). New York: Vintage.
- Foucault, M. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith). New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. 1977. *Language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews* (D. Bouchard, Trans. D. Bouchard Ed.). New York: Cornell University Press.
- Friis-Hansen, E. and Sthapit, B. 2000. *Participatory approaches to the conservation and use of plant genetic resources*. Rome: International Plant Genetic Resources Institute
- Global Crop Trust. *Svalbard Global Seed Vault*. Available at <http://www.croptrust.org/content/svalbard-global-seed-vault> (accessed 22 August 2013).
- Goodman, M. K. 2004. Reading fair trade: political ecological imaginary and the moral economy of fair trade foods. *Political Geography*, 23(7): 891-915.
- Guthman, J. 2003. Fast food/organic food: Reflexive tastes and the making of 'yuppie chow'. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 4(1): 45-58.
- Guthman, J. 2004. Back to the land: the paradox of organic food standards. *Environment and Planning A*, 36(3): 511-528.
- Hammer, K. and Teklu, Y. 2008. Plant Genetic Resources: Selected Issues from Genetic Erosion to Genetic Engineering. *Journal of Agriculture and Rural Development in the Tropics and Subtropics*, 109: 15-50.
- Heritage Seed Library. 2008. *Seed Saving Guidelines*. Available online at http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/members/hsl_pdfs/SeedSavingGuidelinesComplete.pdf (accessed 8 June 2013).
- Hewison, R. 1987. *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* London: Methuen.

- Holloway, L. and Kneafsey, M. 2000. Reading the Space of the Framers 'Market: A Case Study from the United Kingdom. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40(3): 285-299.
- Jabs, C. 1984. *The Heirloom Gardener*. San Fransisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Jackson, P., Ward, N. and Russell, P. (2009). Moral economies of food and geographies of responsibility. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 34(1): 12-24.
- Jordan, J. A. 2007. The Heirloom Tomato as Cultural Object: Investigating Taste and Space. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 47 (1): 20-41.
- Jordan, J. A. (2010). Landscapes of European Memory: Biodiversity and Collective Remembrance. *History & Memory*, 22(2): 28.
- Klein, C. 2008. 2008 in review: Gardens. *The Guardian*, 27 Dec. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/dec/27/2008-in-review-gardens?INTCMP=SRCH> (accessed 11 June 2013).
- Kneafsey, M., Cox, R., Holloway, L., Dowler, E., Venn, L. and Tuomainen, H. (2008). *Reconnecting Consumers, Producers and Food: Exploring Alternatives*. Oxford, New York: Berg.
- Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. 2001. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics* (2nd ed.). London: Verso.
- Low, S. 2008. Pssst, want to buy some seeds? *Delicious*, 23 October.
- Louwaars, N. 2011. *Seed Systems and Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*. UN FAO.
- Lowenthal, D. and Binney, M. (eds). 1981. *Our past before us: why do we save it?* London: Temple Smith.
- Lyon, S. 2006. Evaluating fair trade consumption: politics, defetishization and producer participation. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 30(5): 452-464.
- Matthews, J. and Smith Maguire, J. 2014. Introduction: thinking with cultural intermediaries. In Maguire and Matthews (eds) *The Cultural Intermediaries Reader*. London: Sage, pp. 1-12.
- Maye, D., Goodman, M. K. and Holloway, L. 2010. Ethical foodscapes?: premises, promises, and possibilities. *Environment and Planning A*, 42(8): 1782-1796.
- Mulvany, P. and Berger, R. 2002. *Sustaining Agricultural Biodiversity*. Forum for Food Sovereignty. Available at <http://practicalaction.org/docs/ia4/accessgenres.pdf> (accessed 19 August 2013).
- National Trust. 2009. *Appetite for Change report*. Available at <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/document-1355766981317/> (accessed 7 July 2013).
- Nazarea, V. D. 2005. *Heirloom seeds and their keepers: marginality and memory in the conservation of biological diversity*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.
- Negri, V., Maxted, N., and Veteläinen, M. 2009. European landrace conservation: an introduction. In M. Veteläinen, N. Valeria and N. Maxted (Eds.), *European landraces: on-farm conservation, management and use* (pp. 1-22). Rome: IPGRI.
- Osman, A. and Chable, V. 2011. Inventory of initiatives on seeds of landraces in Europe. *Journal of Agriculture and Environment for International Development*, 103: 95-130.
- Parkins, W. and Craig, G. 2006. *Slow living*. Oxford: Berg.
- Parkins, W. and Craig, G. 2011. Slow living and the temporalities of sustainable consumption. In T. Lewis and E. Potter (Eds.), *Ethical Consumption: A critical introduction* (pp. 189-201). Abingdon: Routledge.

- Primal Seeds (no date) Untangling ourselves from the monocult. Webpage, <http://www.primalseeds.org/untangle.htm> (accessed 9 December 2010). The webpage is no longer live, but has been archived on the Wayback Machine web archive at <http://web.archive.org/web/20100907234011/http://www.primalseeds.org/untangle.htm>.
- Reclaim the Fields. 2010. *Bulletin No. 1, May 2010*. Available at <http://www.reclaimthefields.org/sites/default/files/bulletin-rtf-1-en.pdf> (accessed 20 June 2013).
- Reclaim the Seeds 2014. Page promoting Reclaim the Seeds event on ASEED website. Available at <http://aseed.net/en/reclaim-the-seeds-2014-in-haren-groningen/> (accessed 27 June 2014).
- Rivlin, P. 2014. Blog post. Retrieved from <http://culturalvalueproject.wordpress.com/2014/03/21/penny-rivlin-the-cultural-values-of-digging/>
- Samuel, R. 1994. *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (2012 edition). London: Verso.
- Saxena, S. and Singh, A. K. 2006. Revisit to definitions and need for inventorization or registration of landrace, folk, farmers' and traditional varieties. *Current Science*, 91(11): 1451-1454.
- Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture. Scottish Landraces and Traditional Varieties. Available at http://www.scottishlandraces.org.uk/what_are_landraces.htm (accessed 11 June 2013).
- Seed Savers' Exchange. Just How Dangerous is Genetic Erosion? Available at <http://www.seedsavers.org/Education/Saving-Heirlooms/> (accessed 5 December 2010).
- Smith, L. 2006. *Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge.
- Soil Association. 2015. Save Our Seeds. Retrieved 23 February 2015, from <http://www.soilassociation.org/saveourseeds>
- Thomas, L. 2008. Alternative realities: Downshifting narratives in contemporary lifestyle television. *Cultural Studies*, 22(5): 680-699.
- Trobe, H. L. 2001. Farmers' markets: consuming local rural produce. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 25(3): 181-192.
- UK Food Group. 2010. Securing Future Food: Towards Ecological Food Provision. Briefing paper.
- Veteto, J. 2008. The history and survival of traditional heirloom vegetable varieties in the southern Appalachian Mountains of western North Carolina. *Agriculture and Human Values* 25:121–134.
- Vidal, J. 2007. Digging in: Britain's green revolution on the home front. *The Guardian*, 9 April. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/apr/09/foodanddrink.food> (accessed 20 June 2013).
- Wacquant, L. 2013. Symbolic power and group-making: On Pierre Bourdieu's reframing of class. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 13(2): 274-291.
- Waitrose. 2009. English to the Core – Waitrose Revives Ancient Apple Varieties. Available at <http://www.waitrose.presscentre.com/content/detail.aspx?releaseid=929&newsareaid=2> (accessed 7 July 2013).
- Whitmore, A. 1999. Monsanto: corporate food gamble? In J. Madeley (Ed.), *Hungry for Power* (pp. 32-45): UK Food Group.

Wyke, N. 2011. Gallery: heritage tomato varieties. *The Times*, 17 August. Available at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/life/food/realfood/article3137288.ece> (accessed 7 July 2013).