

## INTRODUCTION

# IN THE DANGEROUS KITCHEN



## COOKING MATTERS

“**W**hat should we have for dinner?” Mary Douglas (1974) asked this question in her classic article on the subject as a way to get at the cultural categories by which we define various kinds of meals. But in her family struggles over whether to have soup and a sandwich, or some combination thereof, she expressed no concern regarding how the ingredients might be assembled, processed, and cooked to create these dishes. I often have similar discussions with my own family (or in my head) about what to make for dinner. The other night, I decided on a Greek salad, which I had made a number of times in the past week to take advantage of the fresh tomatoes and cucumbers from the local farmer’s market. Having cut a lovely orange tomato, and halfway through cutting an onion, I remembered that I had half a can of refried beans in the refrigerator that really needed to be used up. I thought, perhaps instead of a Greek salad, I should make soft tacos. All of a sudden, I saw myself putting the chopped tomato into a food processor so I could sauté it with the beans, onion, some mushrooms that might not last much longer, and the leftover brown rice that my son had made earlier that day as part of his “bulking up” diet. Soft tacos it was, but not quite the same soft tacos that I had made before. As I chewed on my tacos, I wondered: was there the kernel of an interesting anthropological idea in these mundane cooking contingencies?

Beyond simple contingencies, I realized that there was a *risk* involved here. Because, in throwing together a dish—say, a stir fry that can contain a number of potential ingredients—one could go too far and add something that simply didn’t belong, that didn’t taste right, or that didn’t go with the other ingredients, as I indeed found out when trying to add leftover salmon to a

stir-fry. Or, in moments of indecision about ingredients, I might add them in the wrong order; in my distraction, I might let the broccoli steam, which is a disaster for a decent stir-fry. At risk was not simply the potential for a good or bad meal, but much more: my own sense of myself as a competent cook and the opinions of others (in this case, my family members) as to my level of skill. Much more was at stake in these mundane decisions than a mere intellectual puzzle but rather something concerning “skill.” Since time is finite, I wondered as well whether my cooking represented time well-utilized or opportunities wasted. What might an anthropology of cooking reveal about these concerns?

There has been a striking, cross-disciplinary growth in food studies over roughly the past thirty years, representing a broad rethinking of aspects of food production, exchange, consumption, and disposal. Anthropology, which has shown less neglect toward the significance of food than many other disciplines, has also revitalized its interests in aspects of the social, sensory, symbolic, and biological ramifications of food, as well as their intersections. Food has provided an impetus to rethink aspects of classic anthropological topics including kinship, exchange, and material culture, as well as a stimulus to expanding more recent interests in power and resistance, materiality and consumption, memory and identity, and the phenomenology of everyday (sensory) experience. Food has been the subject of multisited ethnographies and has provided new anthropological approaches to history. It is certainly a good time to take seriously Claude Levi-Strauss’s claim that food is “Good to Think.”

Scholarly interest in cooking, however, has yet to catch up with this new wave, notwithstanding Levi-Strauss’s view of its centrality in the so-called transition from “nature to culture.” With a few notable exceptions, cooking has been largely neglected as an ethnographic topic in contemporary food studies, and even more so as a site of theoretical reflection. Elsewhere (Sutton 2016a) I have explored some of the reasons for this, as well as some of the notable exceptions. Cooking, has, for example, been thematized in a number of recent studies of gender, identity, knowledge, and power.<sup>1</sup> It has also been given attention by a few scholars interested in material culture studies and the ways that cooking creates certain kinds of culturally mediated transformations of substances and socialities.<sup>2</sup> In my own ethnographic work, I have explored some of the ways that cooking might be used to think about the relationship between skill, embodiment, and everyday life. Here, however, I want to argue for a different potential trajectory for cooking theory by suggesting that an approach to cooking as *everyday risk* can offer new insights into the question “what is cooking?” while also providing a topic for ethnographic research that can push certain theoretical perspectives forward in new ways.

It is clear that cooking has not been taken seriously, both because of what it is—a repetitive, daily task—and who performs it. On the former, historian of cooking Michael Symons points out that the very “repetitiveness of cooking is part of the reason why many Western intellectuals have snubbed it” (Symons 2003: 26). However, the notion of repetitiveness requires a point of view on what is similar and what is different<sup>3</sup> and is one of the things that makes cooking potentially valuable to anthropologists employing an ethnographic approach. On the latter point—who does the cooking—Krishnendu Ray notes that cooking has been treated as trivial in the academy, at the same time music and architecture were taken very seriously: “triviality is linked basically to the inferiority of the subject—it is mostly women and mostly poor people who do most of the cooking in most parts of the world. That’s still not taken seriously in the higher reaches of even the cultural academy of men theorizing.”<sup>4</sup> Or, cooking may be segmented into that which is “interesting,” i.e., done by professional chefs, and the repetitive drudgery of everyday cooking done by women, a theme that runs through much literature on cooking. As Vicki Swinbank notes, however, this is often a matter of perspective, as women downplay their originality and stress the ways they share knowledge within a cooking community, while male professional chefs “draw upon the traditional recipes of these women, without giving due acknowledgement, often elaborating on these recipes in order to claim them as their own” (2002: 470). Furthermore, Swinbank argues that it is the “very everydayness of women’s domestic cooking that causes it to be overlooked and not counted as culture. The largely non-individualistic, collective tradition of women’s cooking is generally dismissed by male intellectuals, who consider that only the ‘exceptional and the extraordinary’ constitute culture” (2002: 478).

I have more to say on the “exceptional and the extraordinary” below. But it seems to me that one of the advantages that the study of cooking offers is that it is indeed an everyday practice, which, while perhaps “mundane” to some, is never exactly the same from one day to the next. It is always caught up in the contingencies of social situations, changing environments, recalcitrant ingredients, and ordinary creativity. In her groundbreaking book *Kitchen Secrets: The Meaning of Cooking in Everyday Life*, Frances Short (2006) documents the many “skills” involved in an expansive understanding of cooking that includes the frenetic balancing of daily contingencies, caring and coping with (familial, one’s own) preferences, and the demands of life. She suggests a person-centered, rather than task-centered, understanding of cooking, a contrast she describes as follows:

A task-centred perspective might see making bread as requiring or utilizing a range of techniques, including mixing, kneading, rolling and shaping. A person-centred ap-

proach, on the other hand, would take into consideration the perceptual, conceptual, emotional and logistical cooking skills used or required by the cook and the circumstances or context in which making the bread took place. (2006: 61)

While in my own work I found it worthwhile to blur the line between “persons” and “tasks” (Sutton 2014: chap. 2), Short’s work was an inspiration in showing how much ethnographically interesting stuff might go into preparing a meal that was not in any other sense special or unusual.

At the same time, it is necessary to note that, as food scholars have been showing for the past twenty years, food is not irrelevant to wider sociopolitical concerns; its mundaneness is also part of its ability to entwine issues of gender, class, race, and identities on multiple scales in the pragmatics of daily life. As Wim Van Daele notes, food almost seems unavoidable as a topic for anthropologists, given their interest in how people live their lives. Those who did write about it, in studies of small-scale societies,

wrote about food in its connections and entanglements with other aspects of human life and organisation, including political life . . . the wider economy of exchanges . . . and transformations of values in exchanges. As such, food was studied not just in and for itself, as a mere topic, but it also served almost methodologically as a means to study things other than food by way of which food became approached more holistically.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, food is a nexus of activity that can lead to many other issues and understandings of both the structure and everyday negotiation of social processes and cultural meanings. But what might it mean to study “food as food,” rather than simply as a window onto something else? This question, posed by Jon Holtzman (2009: 50), reminds us that for all of the value of our holism, we have no trouble reading analyses that take topics such as kinship, exchange, ritual, gender, or migration as central rather than mere windows onto other subjects. And, while the approach to cooking that I am arguing for has much to tell us about many other topics, I would like to start from the idea that studying cooking as cooking is valuable in itself (and not just for the gastronomes among us).

I am thus arguing for the value of thinking about cooking as a kind of everyday risk. This is not meant as a criticism of the extant theoretical approaches to cooking.<sup>6</sup> There is no doubt great value in exploring cooking in terms of gender empowerment and gender oppression, as has become apparent through exciting recent works, as well as thinking of cooking as an art form, a chore, an occupation, or a rich metaphor for cultural processes.<sup>7</sup> I propose *cooking as risk* because it allows me to tie together a number of theoretical approaches that have not previously been applied to cooking. Risk offers something new, a different way to think of cooking as a topic of research, and one that happens to fit rather well with my ethnographic

experience of studying cooking on the island of Kalymnos, Greece. The extent to which this is a useful way of thinking about cooking is not limited to my foremost example: Kalymnos. Rather, there might be other places like Kalymnos where everyday risk is, or is not, a trenchant starting point for analyzing cooking.

I employ the word “risk” because it is a useful term in the anthropology of Greece, where my ethnographic work is based, for capturing the confrontation with uncertainty that a number of anthropologists have explored. In addition, risk allows me to engage with several theoretical interventions in the following chapters. First, I address Marshall Sahlins’s anthropological approach to history in his famed work on Hawaii, in which he argued for a view of historical process as “the risk of categories in practice” (Sahlins 1985). Cooking is a testing ground for Sahlins’s approach and illustrates its strengths as well as potential areas in which it is incomplete. This approach provides a template for the possibility of understanding continuity and change through micro-level research that is attuned, in classic anthropological fashion, to the larger ramifications of the details of everyday life. We have had over thirty years of anthropology that explicitly thematizes change (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1993) while other important voices have argued that we have moved to questions of change while never having truly understood the processes that create continuity (e.g. Connerton 1989).<sup>8</sup> A renewed anthropology of “the event” suggests a focus on what is surprising or unexpected as the key to understanding, even though, as Thijs Van Dooremalen (2017) points out, as a fieldwork strategy it is very hard to plan to study the unexpected. I argue that employing the tools offered by Sahlins’s approach allows us to operationalize research that puts itself in the moments when continuity and change happen, and thus to get at Symons’s perhaps grandiose comment: “But while each of the cook’s actions might be infinitesimal, the results have multiplied into civilisation” (2003: x).

Second, we must consider craft theorist David Pye’s notion of the “workmanship of risk” (1968) as a key aspect of craft practice. Pye’s concept has been useful in some anthropological approaches to craft (Ingold 2013) and to artisanal food production (Paxson 2013). It contrasts with the “workmanship of certainty” and undermines concerns over the loss of the human aspects of craft practice, one of which Richard Sennett (2008) metonymizes as “the hand” (resonating with Greek linguistic practice of focusing on “the hand” that makes and “the eye” that evaluates in cooking). In focusing on the workmanship of risk, I complement some of the cognitive biases of Sahlins’s ideas about “the risk of categories” with an embodied approach. This approach draws on the insights of Ingold and other anthropologists who want to bring our research back to questions of how we learn to do specific tasks in a manner considered skillful. I drew heavily from this method in my eth-

nography of everyday cooking on Kalymnos (2014). It provided a way to understand the significance of culturally embedded ways of cutting vegetables or rolling out phyllo dough, and what these activities could reveal about the often emergent properties of cooking. In addition, it helps to reveal the problematic directions taken by certain approaches to technology in the kitchen under neoliberal capitalism.

A full understanding of cooking demands that we wed these different approaches that recognize that recipes and other “plans” do play a significant role in cooking, even if they do not in any sense determine the final outcome of the dish. Perhaps there is more in common in the seemingly opposing approaches of a theorist like Sahlins and a theorist like Ingold than meets the eye.

My third substantive chapter engages what Sahlins calls *subjective risk*. This term describes the ways Greek understandings of historical processes—their “historicity” (Stewart 2016)—shape their willingness to embrace and reward risk-taking as an everyday attitude. In studying Kalymnian cooking, one might expect to encounter a discourse about the value of tradition and adherence to the past. In fact, I find a broad cultural acceptance of the notion that value is created through embracing the contingent and risky. While previous anthropological work has ascribed embrace of risk as broadly typical of Greek men, many have ignored the extent to which we find similar values among women, even though they might not explicitly articulate them. Rather, women enact these values in their struggles to establish their identities in a recalcitrant world.

This concept of risk also reveals how Greeks see the relationship between past and future. Notions of time have become more prevalent in anthropological writings on Greece. Yet, these works have not synthesized Greek experiences of time with notions of risk and agency. While I’ve long been interested in issues that point to the past, the meaning of tradition, and the role of memory in everyday life in Greece (1998, 2001), looking at risk is one way of ensuring that our analysis captures the dynamic tension that always exists between past, present, and future—regardless of whether the people we study are labeled or self-label as “traditional” or “modern.” As Jens Zinn (2019: 23–24), paraphrasing John Maynard Keynes, notes: in understanding risk and risk-taking, “Knowledge of the past is valuable but at the same time comes with systematic limits when we are dealing with innovation and the unknowns of the future. This is the case not only for entrepreneurs in the realm of economics but a typical characteristic of everyday life.” It is the unfinished nature of cooking and the fact that variation always creeps in (intentionally or unintentionally) that makes it ideal for thinking about this nexus of past-present-future and even for realigning memory with a kind of sensory perception.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 0.1.** Alexandra Passa cutting bread in her Kalymnian kitchen. Photo courtesy of Dimitris Roditis.

In conclusion, Greece and Kalymnos are not entirely unique in the broader cultural scene. My theory of cooking as everyday risk is applicable to other kitchens in other times and places. It provides a framework through which we can access cooking across cultures, though no doubt with many cultural particularities in the understanding and enactment of everyday cooking in practice.

## DANGEROUS KITCHENS

Frank Zappa, no doubt with tongue in cheek, imagines the kitchen as a dangerous place in his song “The Dangerous Kitchen.”<sup>10</sup> It contains lurking hazards of varying degrees of harm—including sharp edges of cans, which we will be considering in chapter 3—making it, indeed, a risk even to enter. It is indisputable that the kitchen presents many physical hazards, especially for the careless cook. As I illustrate when I give formal presentations on Kalymnian cooking, Kalymnian cutting puts one’s body, quite literally, at

the knife's edge. A cook cradles a long loaf of daily bread against their chest and wields a knife like the bow of a violin. In this pose, the chest constitutes the only oppositional support for the loaf, while the Kalymnian cook creates slice marks in order to more easily tear off portion-sized pieces. But other kinds of risk—such as the cognitive, existential, and interactional types—also lurk in the kitchen.

Allow me to clarify why I use the term “everyday risk,” and why the concept of risk is useful, given that it is a term with a long history in the social sciences. One issue with the term “risk” is that it is generally used in a negative sense to refer to undesired outcomes. “The word has been pre-empted to mean bad risks” (Douglas 1992: 24). Social scientists often associate risk with various techniques of risk “management” or “minimization.”<sup>11</sup> Limiting risk is the entire point of fields such as safety science and risk analysis, which treat risk as a noun or an objective feature of certain environments. Here, risk is understood in relation to calculation, and the idea is that everything is, in the end, calculable (Zinn 2019: 19). Ulrich Beck famously dubbed modernity “risk society” (1992) because risk is displaced from the local community onto a wider collective that faces various social and ecological catastrophes. Risk is also foisted on the individual who, “increasingly bereft of collective identity and belonging,” confronts what Beck calls “biographical risk.”<sup>12</sup> This approach is also associated with Anthony Giddens’ division of societies into “modern” societies that have lost the stabilizing aspects of the traditional and thus are vulnerable to the anxieties of an unknown future (1999). Such an analysis counterposes the modern with a “traditional” society of stereotypical reproduction of a future much like the past and belief in “fate” as the cause of misfortune (Giddens 1999). Giddens’ approach has been roundly criticized in anthropology, and this description of tradition certainly does not apply to the Greece that I knew in the early 1990s.<sup>13</sup> Just as Sahlins’ analysis makes continuity and change inseparable aspects of all practice, Greek and Kalymnian cooks find ways to embrace the possibilities afforded by contingency and change as much as they look for continuities in their daily practice, as I will explore in chapter 3. I draw little, then, from this literature on risk society except the idea that there are certain aspects of risk that we can call “objective,” though not perhaps in the way meant by Beck and others. As Sahlins argues, and I will explore in the next chapter: every act of reference is a risk, whether intended or not. If I briefly embrace this “objective” understanding, I also would insist, as Zinn argues, that treating risk as a “thing” rather than an “activity” ignores the contextual aspects that are key to understanding risk: “When approaching risk as a process of *doing*, the social aspects more easily enter the debate, since risk does not exist independently of the people, organizations or other social instances, which *perform risk*” (Zinn 2019: 30, emphasis in original).

Alternatively, a long sociological tradition debates the role of risk in relation to capitalist profit, entrepreneurship, and its recent postmodern forms such as “edgework,” that is, activities that are engaged in specifically because of the desire to embrace the thrill of risk.<sup>14</sup> As with the social sciences, these subject areas appear distant from this book’s concerns. However, such approaches reveal that there is not only objective risk, but also “voluntary risk” in which one willingly exposes oneself to risk for certain purposes (Zinn 2019: 75–77). This fits with the idea that risk is about “interrupting the ordinariness and repetitiveness of life which rewards us with an intensified feeling of being alive” (Zinn 2019: 2).

But what constitutes repetitiveness, and what constitutes an interruption? Feminist critiques of edgework, such as Staci Newmahr’s (2011: 686) study of BDSM practices, point out that “the very conceptualization of the edge is gendered.” Much theorizing of edgework focuses on physical challenges that stress individualism and self-reliance and usually involve “a romantic, dichotomous tension between the wilderness and civilization” (2011: 689). Newmahr suggests expanding edgework not simply to include women, but also practices that are collaborative and based on emotional work, such as activities that involve trust and pain. This got me thinking more about Kalymnian women’s own experiences and definitions of risk. However, Newmahr insists that edgework is defined by extreme experiences, such as sexual experimentation, and that it is a part of the domain of leisure rather than an obligatory or mundane activity.

As I was in the final stages of writing this, my wife drew my attention to an issue of the home and lifestyle magazine *Magnolia Journal* (Issue 15, Summer 2020) titled “A Look at Risk: Choosing Courage to Face the Unknown.” This journal is part of the media empire of Joanna and Chip Gaines, most known for their TV series *Fixer Upper* about home renovation. “The Unknown” was no doubt on the minds of many readers of this issue, published as it was in the midst of the COVID-19 lockdown. But the issue only makes very oblique reference to this, noting that “for many of us, reality has shifted. In light of what we’ve learned and experienced together, there’s a chance we understand risk differently than we did before.” The issue goes on to discuss all kinds of design and lifestyle elements—food, wallpaper, summer planning, starting a business—as choices we can either approach through caution and certainty or take the risky route. “Once we acknowledge that risk is in every choice we make . . . opportunity appears all around us too” is written on a page with drawings suggesting readers should check the box next to more risky choices, for example, painting your home a new color rather than leaving it the same and never knowing whether you would like it. Throughout the issue, the reader is urged to embrace risk over possible embarrassment, to face choices with courage rather than fear. Mundane risk

for sure. But a risk that takes place in a world of individuals (and occasionally families) who only interact with others when they choose to take the risk of opening their homes to others and taking the “risk of being real.” It would be easy enough to see this as a particular kind of vision of the neoliberal entrepreneur already, but the issue also includes a feature on Sara Blakely, founder and CEO of Spanx Inc., who writes about being encouraged as a child to fail as often as possible so that she was inured to the embarrassment of risk-taking as an essential part of becoming an entrepreneur. While this mundane example suggests the ubiquity of the “subjective risk” that I will explore in chapter 3, it partakes of a very different vision of risk than that of the “tricks and patents” that I argue is central to Greek kitchen risk-taking.

How might we think of mundane risk not as a free-floating choice made by neoliberal individuals, but rather as embedded in a community life? One evening, over dinner, I was challenged by my long-time friends and colleagues Nina Glick-Schiller and Steve Reyna over whether cooking is, in fact, risky at all. To persuade them, I asked them to imagine a setting in which taste matters deeply on a daily basis. Each meal undergoes an autopsy of its successes and failures and the ability to produce good-tasting food is part of one’s reputation. This reputation, while never defined by one particular meal, is built up slowly over a lifetime and is recognized in the community both through daily discussions and the fact that Kalymnian women routinely offer food to neighbors and friends in memory of departed loved ones. Thus, cooking is risky not in the extreme sense of “danger” described above as “edgework,” but also because any attempt to simply reproduce or improve a dish—for instance, to try something new or something “traditional” but long forgotten—will be evaluated by a wide group of eaters in a community that places high value on so-called gossip or publicly-circulated reputation.<sup>15</sup> On Kalymnos I found a community that also was very much committed to a shared sense of taste, negotiated and shifting over time, but always part of a wider discourse the community participated in, what Mintz defines as “cuisine,” and what I call “gustemology.”<sup>16</sup> One such example of embedded risk was provided to me by anthropologist Stavroula Pipyrou, who in making observations about her home village of Kalloni in Northern Greece, notes that women speak of the “danger” involved in trying to cross a “threshold” and take one’s cooking to the next level. As she describes:

Maria (47) was making phyllo for a pie (*pitta*) in the presence of her mother Spirydoula (77). For those who have experienced the *pitta* of our grandmothers, it is a level of accomplishing something. The *pitta* of our grandmothers is *art*, not nostalgia. It is an objective affirmation of how you make a *pitta*: The color, how you bake it, it is a whole process for just a single *pitta*. The mother Spirydoula was frustrated because Maria wasn’t accomplished enough to roll out the phyllo with the rolling pin. And Maria was conscious of the risky situation she had put herself in. That was her own

assessment in which she said “kindinevo” (I am in danger). She was in danger at many levels: of disappointing her mother, of harming her own reputation because she is a good cook. Also, there is an element of investing your time, investing your ability to do things on the spot. If you open phyllo you have to feel it, otherwise you create all these holes in it and your mother or grandmother will laugh at you. And potentially you have to start over from scratch; the more anxious you become because you lose patience, the “bloody thing” feels it, understands it, and acts accordingly because your hands are not smooth, you make jerky movements.<sup>17</sup>

Such reflections resonate with my own observations of the perceived skill and “synesthetic reason” (Paxson 2011) entailed in rolling out phyllo dough. In addition, the symbiotic relationship between the hand, rolling pin, and dough suggests a distributed agency I analyze elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> But here I emphasize the sense of multiple, subjectively perceived dangers, and the rewards that accompany it: the potential to cross the threshold and be considered “good at rolling out a *pitta*.” As Pipyrou summarized: “The question is ‘who dares to do it?’” Furthermore, one gets a sense of the temporal dimensions of risk-taking, since success involves being able to adjust “on the spot,” while also recognizing that one may lose the time invested in the process.

An approach to risk that draws on practice theory and focuses on the everyday rather than the extraordinary gets closer to what I am after. Zinn’s book, *Understanding Risk Taking*, largely works in this tradition. Zinn suggests seeing risk and risk-taking as a “normal part of life” (2019: 136), rather than as disruptive or extraordinary. With this approach, “risk-taking appears primarily as part of everyday routines (practices) which constitute risks’ mundane character” (2019: 120). According to this view, risk-taking is still dangerous, as much of this work focuses on issues like drug-taking that have strongly negative health or legal consequences. Yet, this practice approach also recognizes that risks are embedded in a larger cultural context of practices within which they make sense. Risks are neither irrational nor rational, as in some of the literature on risk, but rely on tacit knowledge of particular situations. They “are ways of managing uncertainty, and in many circumstances [risk-taking is] more successful than rational strategies” (2019: 278–79). This fits with how I approached Kalyrnian cutting as a “technique of the body,” as Marcel Mauss would put it, embedded in a specific cultural environment. Kalyrnian cutting draws on tacit knowledge to manage the uncertainty of the daily acts of processing and preparing ingredients in which concerns over some objective notion of rationality or efficiency feel highly misplaced.

I am also drawn to work by Giovanni Orlando that explores how the risks associated with eating food produced under conditions of capitalist industrial agriculture are negotiated by consumers in Palermo, Sicily. Rather than experiencing the dangers of food as part of the larger environmental dangers of Beck’s “risk society,” consumers in Palermo integrate an understanding of

food risk into their ordinary lives through what Orlando dubs “risk practice.” This “risk practice” played out as much in bodily and sensory experience as in cognitive abstractions about risk posed as top-down, “expert discourses.” As Orlando notes, his subjects

regularly remarked on food’s sensorial properties while showing [him] the contents of their kitchen cupboards and fridges, and while actually eating. This synesthetic dimension was linked to notions of risk, as people held the sensual properties of what they ate to be of great significance in establishing which foods were risky and which were not. (2018: 153)

I had similar experiences on Kalymnos, where the risk of cooking was always drawn into local discourses about what makes food “good” and was grounded in Kalymnians’ trust for their sensory capacities, as part of a larger “sensory order” (Howes 2003), which I analyze in more detail elsewhere. Kalymnians distinguished between good and bad based on life-long experiences, through which they developed the skills to navigate the myriad challenges of shopping and cooking.<sup>19</sup>

Another useful sense of “objective” risk can be found in Mary Douglas’s work. Here, risk is embedded in social and symbolic systems—indeed, much like taboos, ideas about risk help maintain social and political orders. “Risk, in Douglas’s view, is the threat of the classificatory system being thrown out of kilter” (Arnoldi 2009: 39). Now we approach a mundane understanding of risk in which it is neither voluntary nor extraordinary, but an inescapable part of everyday perception and action. Douglas developed her ideas of risk and taboo both by exploring the reasons that the ancient Hebrews banned pork (along with many other things), as well as understanding the daily decisions of contemporary life regarding what makes breakfast “breakfast” and dinner “dinner.” In this same way, when I was told by Greeks on the island of Kalymnos that carrots don’t go in lentil stew, I was confronted with a question of categories and their transgression. I return to Douglas in the context of laying out Sahlins’s approach in the next chapter.

But, given these caveats, why use risk at all? At certain points in the following chapters, I will suggest that connected terms such as “contingency,” or even “possibility,” are appropriate for some aspects of the phenomena I am discussing. Yet, risk provides a convenient term to connect these different levels of analysis, from concerns with the perception of meals and taste to discussions of what is proper and improper cooking. The multiple meanings of risk make my choice of term, *everyday risk*, somewhat risky in itself. It may lead readers to expect certain analytical roads that I will not be traveling. Hopefully, it is a risk that will pay off if I can convince readers that these different ways of thinking about risk are worth their consideration. As Zappa sings “In the kitchen of danger / You can feel like a stranger.”<sup>20</sup>

## NOTES

1. Counihan 2010; Abarca 2006; Gvion 2012.
2. Weiss 1996; Adapon 2008; Janeja 2010.
3. As I discuss in Sutton 2001: chap. 4.
4. Krishnendu Ray, *New Books in Food*, 31 July 2019, 1:30–1:15 remaining. Retrieved 1 December 2020 from <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/krishnendu-ray-the-ethnic-restaurateur-bloomsbury-2016/id425670722?i=1000445777418>. Even women theorizing often do not seem to have an interest in this topic. As Elisabeth l’Orange Furst (1997: 441) wrote about the tendency to treat woman’s cooking as purely an artifact of patriarchal oppression: “Housework [including cooking] in some feminist thinking is considered to be a dull, stupefying, and even slave-like task, and something women ought to be freed from.”
5. This was from a Call for Papers for a workshop at University of Oslo organized by Wim Van Daele in 2016 as part of The University of Oslo’s European Research Council Overheating Grant, overseen by Thomas Hylland Ericksen.
6. As reviewed in Sutton 2016a.
7. See e.g., Black 2021; Trubek 2017; and Palmié 2013.
8. Pierre Bourdieu’s (1990) concepts of habitus and dispositions and Paul Connerton’s (1989) of habit memory are two of the most well-known examples of approaches that seek to account for continuity.
9. See Sutton 2011.
10. “Frank Zappa—The Dangerous Kitchen Lyrics,” *Songlyrics*. Retrieved 1 December 2020 from <http://www.songlyrics.com/frank-zappa/the-dangerous-kitchen-lyrics/>.
11. Yoko Akama, Sarah Pink, and Shanti Sumartojo (2018) make a similar argument for the concept of “uncertainty.” But unfortunately for my purposes, they seem to want to recuperate uncertainty, to “re-conceptualize uncertainty as generative and inevitable, rather than as threatening” (2018: 25), by separating out its negative aspects as “risk.”
12. See discussion in Arnoldi 2009: 51.
13. For a developed critique of Giddens based on her research on changes in a Spanish village, see Jane Collier (1997). For my own contribution to debunking the tradition/modernity dichotomy, see Sutton (1994; 2008).
14. Appadurai 2012; Boholm 2003; Garot 2015; Garsten and Hasselstrom 2003; Palmer 2002.
15. See du Boulay 1974; Sutton 2001: chap. 2.
16. Mintz 1997; Sutton 2014.
17. Pipyrou, personal communication with author via Skype, 25 January 2020. Pipyrou also filmed cooking among some of her friends and neighbors in the village, however her primary field site is in Calabria, Italy (see Pipyrou 2016).
18. See Sutton 2014: chap. 2.
19. See esp. Sutton 2001: chap. 3; Sutton 2014: chap. 1
20. “Frank Zappa—The Dangerous Kitchen Lyrics,” *Songlyrics*. Retrieved 1 December 2020 from <http://www.songlyrics.com/frank-zappa/the-dangerous-kitchen-lyrics/>.