

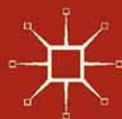
CONSUMPTION AND PUBLIC LIFE



# FOOD CONSUMPTION IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Essays in the Anthropology of Food  
in Honour of Jack Goody

EDITED BY JAKOB A. KLEIN  
AND ANNE MURCOTT



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# Food Consumption in Global Perspective

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in Honour of Jack Goody

Edited by

Jakob A. Klein and Anne Murcott

*School of Oriental and African Studies, UK*

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# Foreword

## Michelin, tyres or restaurants?

My contribution to the study of food was made very much from a historical viewpoint, with a view to trying to explain the broad contrasts between Africa on one side and Eurasia on the other. I had been drawn to this problem by an essay by a French academic, who under the influence of structuralist anthropology had compared the food of the two regions in a binary way, to my mind ignoring the basic economic and cultural differences between the two: one cannot just compare the practices in those terms without taking into account the central differences in the processes of production. Europe and Asia – that I wanted to draw together – had to be contrasted in this respect with the areas that had not experienced the Agricultural Revolution of the Bronze Age. The well-known ‘structuralist’ objection to historical explanations coincided with the functionalist ones. That neglect made little sense of their comparisons. One had to take into account the historical background – in particular, the growth of an ‘upper’ group that possessed its own cuisine, its own high status cooking, such as existed in both the East and the West of the Eurasian continent, qualifying many views of the superiority and uniqueness of European culture. It was this that made me begin my comparison of East and West in many sociocultural fields and to query its uniqueness in the development of capitalism and industrialism.

The idea of one ‘culture’, one cooking, might be OK for African tribes but certainly was not for major Eurasian societies. Differentiation into some form of high and low was intrinsic to those societies, with the high being enshrined in the written – the early cookbooks. I remember one distinguished Africanist telling me that one ‘informant’ was as good as another for many purposes, while another explained that a chief’s meal might consist of more porridge but that one dish was much like another. Neither were true in Eurasia.

As I argue, ‘upper’ food was characterized by the search for distinct ingredients, already apparent in ancient Rome and China. Hence travel was the key to this form of differentiation, or at least having others to travel on one’s own behalf. This was transformed when one became the traveller, not dependent upon the merchant. It is therefore completely understandable why gastronomy and travel should have such a close relationship, as famously in the case of Michelin. This French

tyre manufacturer became linked to its famous starred restaurants (and maps) because it was anxious to promote travel, initially in Europe where one could get to by car and to which it provided its excellent guides. Gastronomy was one way in which clients could be encouraged to travel that extra mile. Meanwhile the clientele grew with the spread of car ownership so that the definition of 'upper' changed radically with the raising of luxury standards of the many bringing with it a shift in the stratification of food, although this was sometimes downwards as in supermarkets.

These changes are not captured by the standard ethnographic analysis, which has other aims and other advantages. But this is a problem of which we have to be aware, especially in doing comparative work. Otherwise one is stuck in a static frame, unsatisfactory from the perspective of the 'longue durée' in which I was getting involved and to which this study, the first of a series involving the East and West, pointed the way.

I am most grateful if my attempt has drawn attention to a neglected field of observation and its changes over time, leading to the 'industrialization of food'.

Jack Goody  
St Johns College, Cambridge

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**Johan Pottier** specializes in the social dynamics of food security, including urban security (Malawi, Uganda), media representations of conflict (Rwanda) and humanitarian intervention (Democratic Republic of Congo). His publications include *Anthropology of Food: The Social Dynamics of Food Security* (1999) and *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the late 20th Century* (2002). His research on the rise of the Bangladeshi cuisine in East London began in 2009 and is ongoing. He is Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at the SOAS, University of London, UK.

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*Economy of Food and Eating* (co-edited with Melissa L. Caldwell, 2005). He is currently editing (with Jakob Klein) the *Handbook of Food and Anthropology* (forthcoming).

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# 1

## Introduction: *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* and the Anthropology of Food

*Jakob A. Klein*

In a review essay discussing Jack Goody's (1982) *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology*, the anthropologist Sidney Mintz describes the book as 'a pioneering work, because it looks broadly at the many-sided relationship between food and the rest of culture' (Mintz 1989: 185). Later, Mintz and Christine Du Bois (2002) argue that the publication of *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* in 1982 marked a 'turning point' in the development of the anthropology of food and eating. By the time of their writing in 2002, they assert that the field had 'matured enough to serve as a vehicle for examining large and varied problems of theory and research methods' (Mintz and Du Bois 2002: 100). Since then, the anthropology of food has continued to prosper and mature. This is evidenced by a growing number of academic conferences, research centres, university course modules and postgraduate programmes and by the proliferation and growing sophistication of publications in the anthropology and wider social science of food, including dedicated journals (e.g., *Food, Culture and Society*; *Food and Foodways*; *Gastronomica*; *Food and History*), readers (e.g., Watson and Caldwell 2005; Counihan and Van Esterik 2013) and handbooks (e.g., Murcott, Belasco and Jackson 2013; Pilcher 2012; Watson and Klein forthcoming).<sup>1</sup>

Goody's contributions to the anthropology of food have not been sufficiently acknowledged, however, despite the fact that many of the questions raised in *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (hereafter *CCC*) continue to attract a great deal of academic attention. It is in recognition of the enduring significance of Goody's seminal work that the editors have brought together these essays by scholars of food working in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and history, following on from a

small symposium at the Food Studies Centre of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London, held in 2012, to coincide with the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of *CCC*.

*CCC* is an ambitious book. Its author sets out to challenge the kind of symbolic analyses that had come to dominate social anthropological approaches to the study of food during the 1960s and 1970s, which were characterized by the search for underlying 'cultural logics' that could be understood independently of material factors, social stratification or historical change. Goody, by contrast, sets out to combine the material and the symbolic in a more holistic analysis. His approach is explicitly historical and comparative, and centrally concerned with social hierarchies. Goody seeks to explain why it is that differentiated cuisines emerged in pre-industrial Europe and Asia, 'Eurasia' in his terminology, but not in sub-Saharan Africa. In the latter societies, which he terms 'hieratic', chiefs and their households enjoyed 'more of everything' than others, but they did not 'develop different styles of life' (Goody 1982: 67). By contrast, a number of Eurasian 'hierarchical' societies – as far-flung as Ancient Rome, Medieval England, Abbasid Baghdad and Song (Sung) Dynasty China – all developed elaborate high cuisines. These were marked, among other things, by the use of complex cooking methods, utensils and flavourings; by the incorporation of imported delicacies and other expensive ingredients and condiments; and by the quality of being prepared by specialist, usually male cooks. The ability to partake of and display knowledge of high cuisine was key to distinguishing elite groups from the lower orders, whose food typically was reliant on regional ingredients, especially grains and pulses, and was prepared by domestic, female cooks deploying a narrower range of methods.

Goody's explanation for the broad differences he identifies between Africa and Eurasia rests, firstly, on an analysis of the modes of food production: in contrast to the use of the plough or irrigation systems typical of the intensive agriculture practised throughout much of Eurasia, the hoe-based, shifting cultivation of Africa did not create sufficient surplus for the emergence of differentiated cuisines. Secondly, Goody's explanation highlights differences in what he calls 'modes of communication': the use of the written word in Eurasia was crucial to the development of greater culinary complexity. In the context of restricted literacy, written recipes encoded a core set of culinary practices that could be studied, further elaborated and circulated among the kitchens of the social elites.

Goody's discussion of Africa draws on his own, mostly ethnographic, research in northern Ghana, conducted over a period of three decades,

while his account of Eurasia relies primarily on secondary sources. The monograph is a treasure trove of information and thought-provoking musings on the social histories of the food and drink of the 'Old World'. Goody observes, for example, that societies with hierarchically differentiated cuisines also tend to spawn religious moralities of asceticism and abstinence as inversions of the excesses of haute cuisine (see Zubaida, this volume). He also notes that this moral critique of gastronomic indulgence tends to be upheld by secular revolutionary regimes, at least initially (1982: 147).

In the final quarter of the book, Goody makes an important deviation from his initial question to introduce a new set of topics: he describes the development, especially since the nineteenth century, of 'industrial foods' and their spread through the 'world system' and investigates in European and African contexts how these have had an effect on and interacted with pre-existing patterns of food consumption, including the uses and non-uses of food and drink to express social differentiation. These topics, often glossed under the rubric of food 'globalization', have proven to be particularly enduring in the anthropology of food (e.g., Grew 2000; Phillips 2006; Nützenadel and Trentmann 2008; Inglis and Gimlin 2009; Wilk 2006; Bryant, Bush and Wilk 2013) and are central to the present volume.

Invariably, CCC raised many more questions than could adequately be addressed by a single author in a text of fewer than 300 pages. This was made evident in the 'Symposium Review on *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class*' published as a special issue of *Food and Foodways* in 1989 (Vol. 3, No. 3), in which a number of prominent social scientists not only celebrate Goody's ambitious undertaking but also question several of his findings and approaches. The authors of the present volume are similarly both indebted to and critical of various aspects of Goody's work. In any case, our objective here is not a comprehensive evaluation of CCC. While Goody engages in grand comparisons between Africa and Eurasia and his historical perspective is that of the *longue durée*, the chapters here are concerned with more recent historical developments and focus on smaller ethnographic entities or on comparisons within regions. Thus, rather than tackle all of the questions raised in CCC, the contributors engage with core themes in that book which have been important in their own research, recognizing both Goody's own insights and subsequent discussions in these areas. In so doing, the authors pay homage to the role played by Goody in shaping the anthropology of food today, while at the same time take stock of developments over the last three decades in key areas in this still rapidly growing field.

Three core themes in CCC and in this volume's substantive chapters are addressed in the following sections of this chapter. The first section deals with the relationship between 'production' and 'consumption' in the study of food habits. The second section concerns the links between social stratification and culinary practices. The third section discusses the use of comparison in the study of food habits, particularly in the context of 'globalization'. These three sections, of course, overlap to a considerable degree. In exploring these themes and the relationships between them, the chapters in this volume contribute to discussions around a set of questions raised in CCC, which remains central in the contemporary anthropology of food: how should we approach the relationship between changes and continuities in food consumption habits, on the one hand, and changes in social boundaries, roles and relations, on the other? And in what ways is our understanding of the social dynamics of food consumption in specific localities, especially in recent decades (the focus of most chapters in this book), illuminated by comparative perspectives and an attention to wider, even 'global' processes? Collectively, the chapters in this book build on CCC to further the development of a framework for addressing the social dynamics of food consumption in global perspective.

## **Consumption and production**

The emphasis in this volume is on food practices, including shopping, cooking and eating, that are often glossed under the term 'consumption'. To an extent, then, these chapters are part of the rise of consumption studies seen across the social sciences since the 1970s (Campbell 1987; Miller 1995; Trentmann 2013). In recent anthropology, including studies of food, consumption has often been analysed more or less independently of production and distribution (e.g., Miller 1998; Watson 2006). There is much to be gained from this approach in the anthropology of food, not least because it takes seriously the rise of mass consumption emerging from processes of urbanization, industrialization and globalization. As they become more and more enmeshed in cash economies, expanding cities and migration processes, many of the people whose lives we study, even in rural and food-producing areas, have become heavily reliant on purchased, packaged and pre-prepared food and drink for everyday eating, festive meals and ritual practices. This is vividly illustrated in this volume in the chapters by Watson, Clark, Staples, Abbots and Pottier (Chapters 2–5 and Chapter 8). However, rather than viewing the meanings of these goods as determined by

food supply chains and businesses, be they transnational corporations or roadside vendors, much of the anthropology of food consumption has shown how such goods become 're-appropriated' (Friedman 2004) by 'consumers' through social practices including shopping, gifting, preparing, eating and even talking about food (Watson 2006; Caldwell 2004; Jung 2009). From this perspective, consumption is not passive but involves a wide range of practices that are potentially creative and, indeed, (re)productive of social relations and material forms.

In this volume, Abbots demonstrates the value of this approach to consumption in her account of 'local' foods in Cuenca in the Ecuadorian highlands. She emphasizes the ways in which notions of 'global' foods and 'typical' Cuencano foods shifted according to context and among different social classes. For example, she contrasts the fears of cultural loss brought about by North American fast food chains, expressed by members of the Cuencano middle class, to the views of fast food customers themselves. The latter, mostly members of the lower class who have recently become relatively affluent through remittances sent by family members working in the United States, visit these restaurants as a leisure practice and view their arrival as evidence of Ecuador's and Cuenca's improved standing in the global economy. Some customers also argued that to be successful, North American fast food chains must adapt their menus to Cuencano meal patterns.

Of course, food anthropology must not neglect the study of subsistence farming and foraging, including their interrelationship with shopping and other modes of food provisioning. But as Goody points out in *CCC*, and as Abbots and others in this volume reinforce, scholars of food cannot afford to disregard (or simply nostalgically critique) the important and multifaceted roles that the consumption of 'industrial food' has come to play in people's lives.

Studies that treat consumption practices as partially autonomous from production have shed important light on the meanings of food and drink commodities in social life at particular moments and places, including their use in the construction of individual and group identities along the lines of gender, class and ethnicity. These 'inside meanings' (Mintz 1985) are never wholly determined by the material practices and power-laden social arrangements through which food is produced, stored and distributed. Yet by neglecting the latter, contemporary consumption studies are open to the same criticisms that Goody levels against their 'structuralist' and 'culturalist' antecedents of the 1970s, which stressed the 'symbolic' at the expense of the 'material'; they are of limited use in explaining how culinary practices and food tastes come

about, how they come to be socially differentiated (or not) or why these practices, tastes and differentiations endure or change over time (see also Mintz 1985; Weismantel 1999).

In *CCC*, then, Goody insists that the study of cuisine must always be understood as part of a wider 'process of providing and transforming food' (1982: 37). In Goody's scheme, this process involves five phases: production (the growing of food), distribution (including allocating and storing), preparation (cooking), consumption (eating) and disposal. It is noteworthy that Goody was one of the very few social scientists in the 1980s to recognize the importance of the 'disposal' phase, although he does not discuss it much in *CCC*. Indeed, disposal has only belatedly been taken up, as the 'problem' of food waste has moved up the political agenda (see, e.g., Alexander, Gregson and Gille 2013; Evans, Campbell and Murcott 2013).

In this volume, the importance of linking cooking and eating to a wider 'productive process' is brought out in several of the chapters. In Staples' chapter on small town South India, for example, the development of new styles of eating and hosting, associated with emerging middle-class and youth cultures, has been inseparable from the intensification of food production brought about by the Green Revolution of the 1960s, from the opening up since the 1990s of the Indian economy to the increased flow of outside goods and from the expansion outside the major cities of the electricity infrastructure and growing access to freezers (Chapter 4). Sabban, in her chapter on the growing interest in milk in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China, describes how the particular Chinese preference for powdered milk emerged in part as a response to constraints of production (Chapter 9). These constraints included the perishability and susceptibility to dangerous microorganisms of fresh milk and the limited availability of pasture in an agricultural system dominated by intensive crop farming.

Like Goody, then, several of the authors here situate changes and continuities in culinary practices within the wider productive process. But they add to this a closer attention than did Goody to the meanings to actors themselves of such changes and continuities. Watson, for instance, documents the changing meanings of pork in the villages of Hong Kong's New Territories. Prior to the 1960s, pork was a luxury good, the consumption of which contributed to hierarchical divisions between rich and poor and between men and women. Pork was also a central ingredient in community banquets, known as 'eating from the common pot', which defined village insiders from outsiders. And the offering of pork to the ancestors and division of pork among lineage

members were crucial to annual tomb rites, marking lineage membership and distinguishing rich lineages from poor ones. Forty years later, with greater economic prosperity, access to imported meat and the ubiquity of freezers and refrigerators, pork has become an everyday food, and it has lost much of its former power to mark social differences. Yet if eating pork is in itself no longer special, the public rites of 'common-pot' banquets and pork-sharing have become re-embedded in new forms of distinction-making: these rites have now become a focus of identity politics, part of a supposedly shared Hong Kong 'heritage' distinguishing indigenous people from recent immigrants from the Chinese mainland.

A similar study of radical transformation and continuity of eating practices and their meanings in the context of globalization is provided by Gracia Clark in her study of the changing urban 'foodscape' in Kumasi, Ghana. Yet, while Watson's chapter describes the transformation of a luxury good to an everyday food, Clark's chapter is centrally concerned with an everyday food that has become a special food (Chapters 2 and 3). In the 1970s the cooking of *fufu*, made from boiling and pounding a starchy staple, had been central to marriage, particularly among the dominant Asante ethnic group: women prepared *fufu* on a daily basis in exchange for financial support from a husband. By contrast, Asante funerals were marked by strict periods of fasting and, in particular, the avoidance of *fufu*. Clark describes how economic liberalization has both brought about the proliferation of available prepared food options in Kumasi – including pizzas, Chinese-style spring rolls and fried rice, and Lebanese grilled meats – and created the economic conditions that have made it increasingly unrealistic for women to prepare *fufu* every day, as they are required to spend longer hours at work and be more mobile. In this context, home-made *fufu* has become a rare treat. It is still a powerful marker of Asante identity, and while snacking at funerals has become increasingly elaborate, the eating of *fufu* is still strictly prohibited on these occasions.

In both these cases, Watson and Clark describe how changes in consumption practices were embedded in wider economic patterns including changing modes of food production and distribution. Yet – and this is the key point – these changes were not reducible to the latter or predictable from them. Instead, they make sense only within wider contexts of consumption. Indeed, without a close ethnographic approach that focuses on the meanings of these foods to actors themselves and how these unfold over time, it is impossible to know what constitutes change or continuity to the community in question; more superficial observers of these societies might conclude that *fufu* has

simply given way to foreign-style fast foods or that 'common-pot dining' is now only a commodity, just one of innumerable food styles available on Hong Kong's vibrant restaurant scene. If one of Goody's main contributions to the anthropology of food was to demonstrate that what many analysed as autonomous symbolic systems were themselves the products of historical changes in productive processes, then the chapters in this volume also show that the relevance of such historical changes to the people affected by them cannot be grasped without close, detailed ethnographic attention to people's food habits, which situate changing culinary practices within local cultures of consumption and social relations.

### **Cuisine and social differentiation**

While Goody's comparison between 'hierarchical' Eurasian societies and 'hieratic' African ones does not engage the authors here, his underlying concern with historical changes and regional differences in the relationship between culinary practice and social differentiation most certainly does. Not least, Goody's discussion of the rise of an 'industrial cuisine' in an emerging 'world system' raises important questions about the implications of recent forms of culinary industrialization and globalization for existing patterns of food preparation and eating and their relationship to social differentiation. For example, does the global dissemination of industrial and other foods contribute to the elaboration of culinary distinctions in regions where such distinctions may previously have been downplayed; does it contribute to a levelling of differences elsewhere?

Goody's answers to these questions are suggestive but not fully elaborated. Broadly, he holds that the spread of industrial foods has had a homogenizing effect on culinary distinctions of both class and region in Europe. In Africa the effects appear more complex. He describes the rapid inroads of a range of industrial foods in post-independence northern Ghana, even claiming that the impact of these foods was more noticeable there 'than in areas that already had a strong culinary tradition enshrined in literate forms' (1982: 190). Not only had foods such as tinned sardines and tomato purée found their way into ordinary diets but a new, Western-educated elite had adopted Western-influenced eating styles and, especially, bottled beer. Nevertheless, these same elites had not given up Ghanaian food habits, practising different culinary styles depending on the context. Rather than homogenization, then, for Ghana, Goody describes a situation of 'culinary diglossia' (1982:

184). In a review essay, the sociologist Claude Grignon (1989) praises Goody's subtle and ethnographically rich analysis of the complexities of the impact of industrial foods on eating and social hierarchies in Ghana and contrasts it to what he regards as Goody's much more simplistic approach to Europe. Grignon contends that Goody succumbs to 'prejudices found even among sociologists concerning the standardizations and homogenization of styles of life in so-called consumer society' (Grignon 1989: 181).

Nevertheless, Goody's argument of a levelling of class differences in European food practices, while standing in marked contrast to Bourdieu's (1984) claims that taste and eating styles were enduring and deeply embodied markers of class difference in 1970s France, finds support in the work of Mennell (1985), who argues that class differences at the table decreased in the twentieth century in both England and France, while at the same time there occurred a diversification of lifestyles expressed through culinary taste. Of course, this does not mean that class differences disappeared from culinary contexts, but that these differences became more subtle and complex (Warde 1997).

The effects of culinary industrialization and globalization on expressions of social differentiation is a key concern in several of the chapters in this book and is explored in a variety of regional contexts, including South India (Staples, Chapter 4), Republican-era Shanghai (Sabban, Chapter 9), Highland Ecuador (Abbots, Chapter 5) and among Bangladeshis in East London (Pottier, Chapter 8).

In their analyses of the relationship between social differentiation and cooking in different regional contexts, the contributors to this volume are in certain respects quite close to Goody. Like Goody, they find a broadly Weberian approach, which emphasizes the link between lifestyles and the differentiation of status groups, to be more useful than a Marxian one, in which 'class' is more firmly tied to differences in access to and control over the means of production (see especially chapters by Staples, Abbots and Pottier, Chapters 4, 5 and 8). Further, in the spirit of Goody's theoretical eclecticism, the authors are not overly concerned with strict fidelity to particular definitions of 'class' or other analytical concepts, but draw creatively on several theoretical approaches.

However, the authors here also develop several of Goody's points on cuisine and class, often taking them in new directions. For example, in CCC Goody emphasizes the role that culinary texts have had in the production and reproduction of high cuisines in Eurasia. He does mention that in contexts of widespread literacy, written texts may instead have the opposite effect of spreading high cuisine beyond the social elites,

but he does not explore this point in the book. Two of the contributions to this volume elaborate on the ways in which menus and other written texts have been crucial for circulating knowledge about food between social groups (see also Claflin 2013). Both discuss this in the context of national cultures since the nineteenth century. In Chapter 7, Mennell discusses what he sees as a widespread fear of indigestion in Britain, particularly from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century but evident even today. He suggests, building on the work of Norbert Elias (Elias 1978; Mennell 1985), that the embarrassment surrounding farting, belching and so on had begun among the upper echelons of British society and ‘trickled down’ the social hierarchy to others similarly seeking to distinguish themselves from those further below. The written word and widespread literacy were key mechanisms in this process. Mennell argues, with numerous examples, that these increasingly popular fears were rooted not in ‘ancient folklore’, but in medical opinion of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, disseminated as health advice in books written for the general public.

Sobral’s chapter further illustrates the complexities in the relationship between the written word and culinary differentiation (Chapter 6). He charts the history of the creation of a Portuguese national cuisine in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through a close reading of menus and cookbooks. In certain respects, Sobral shows us, these texts reflected and contributed to the differentiation of an elite, who participated in – or sought to participate in – a cosmopolitan lifestyle centring on French haute cuisine, from the lower classes reliant on various regional foods and cooking practices. Yet the rise of Portuguese nationalism from the end of the nineteenth century brought a partial challenge to French hegemony, as Portuguese regional ‘peasant’ foods became celebrated in elite cookbooks, and even became re-disseminated in reformist cookbooks aimed at the poor. This culinary nationalism was further enshrined in cookbooks backed by the authoritarian regime of the Estado Novo during the 1940s–1970s, which sought to downplay culinary expressions of hierarchical differentiation and instead create a national culture on the basis of Portuguese regional and colonial cultures. This laid the foundation for more recent mutual celebrations of a (de-colonized) national cuisine and Portuguese regional cuisines in the context of international competition over tourism and cultural branding.

Other authors in this collection focus on manners and styles of eating. Goody remarks that table manners ‘make some of the most profound discriminators of stratified styles of life’ (1982: 140). Building on this

insight, upon which Goody himself does not expand much in *CCC*, the contributors take everyday experiences and styles of eating to be crucial to understanding how social differentiation may be established, reproduced and challenged. As Zubaida discusses in his chapter on alcoholic drinks, food and social boundaries in the Middle East, boundaries are established not only through what is consumed or by its manner of preparation but also through particular modes of consumption, including but not limited to 'table manners' (Chapter 10). Taking issue with the romanticism of the Slow Food movement, Zubaida contends that historically the leisurely meal with wine was an elite practice: '[I]n Middle Eastern settings, and in much of the world, hungry people ate their food fast, whether in domestic settings, at market stalls or at work in fields or workshops' (Zubaida, Chapter 10). Small dishes – *mezze* – were once eaten as an accompaniment to drink in certain circles in the Middle East, with equivalents throughout the Mediterranean. But this was considered drinking, not eating. The ubiquity of the *mezze*-based restaurant meal with wine, however, is according to Zubaida a product of recent innovation and transnational diffusion in the restaurant trade.

As several of the authors here assert in their discussions of styles of eating, these uses of food to construct social boundaries are often manifested through the body. As already discussed, Mennell mentions in Chapter 7 the links in England that connected social aspirations and the embarrassment surrounding the (perceived) effects on the body of eating certain foods. Pottier adds that among Bangladeshis in contemporary London, the smells of some foods may be associated with the bodies of people from particular regions because of what they are assumed to eat (Chapter 8). Staples, in his discussion of the partial shift from caste to class in South Indian eating, emphasizes the importance of bodily comportment in serving, receiving and eating food for the demarcation of boundaries of caste and class (Chapter 4). Staples' account is in many ways reminiscent of Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of class *habitus*. Yet in contrast to Bourdieu, for whom such bodily practices were the products of deep-seated dispositions, in Staples' account South Indians were highly aware of these bodily performances and used them knowingly to adopt or perform new class 'identities'.

Goody's relatively limited attention to the minutiae of everyday eating practices is of course related to the fact that his main concern is with long-term historical change and comparison between macro-regions. Similarly, Goody seeks to identify the presence or absence of a differentiated cuisine in a given society but, beyond a broad contrast between the 'hierarchical' and 'hieratic', he pays little attention to different kinds of

social differentiation between or within societies and how these may be variously marked through culinary practices. By contrast, for several of the contributors here, the relationship between different kinds of social differentiation is taken to be central to achieving a more nuanced understanding of food globalization and its relationship to social change. Staples, as indicated above, argues in Chapter 4 that in the rural South Indian setting that he has been visiting for over two decades, the relationship between 'caste' and cooking is much more fluid than the classical ethnography of India would lead us to believe. Moreover, over the course of his research, 'class' distinctions have become an increasingly significant factor in culinary practices, overlapping with and, to some extent, competing with 'caste' divisions. In particular, following economic liberalization and growing access to foreign-style and commercial foods, many rural and small-town people have begun to emulate the cooking and hospitality styles of India's growing urban middle class. As with the other long-term ethnographies in this volume, notably the chapters by Watson and Clark, Staples' chapter pays close attention to actors' perspectives to reveal ongoing redefinitions of the relationship between food practices and social identities and divisions.

Goody's discussion of social and culinary differentiation is inadequate for understanding many of the cases presented here. Where Goody discusses the presence or absence of high cuisine, authors in this volume explore changing patterns of differentiation, along the lines of class, caste, gender, age, locality and ethnicity. The expression of these multiple and shifting forms of differentiation through culinary forms is often highly contextual and open to multiple interpretation and debate. These nuances are not captured by Goody's simple opposition between 'high' and 'low' cuisine. As Goody himself argues (1982: 170, 190), in Western consumer societies in the twentieth century, new forms of mass media and intensified global trade in foodstuffs broadened access to many once luxury foods and cooking styles beyond the elites, cutting across previous culinary hierarchies. Indeed, the patterns of food globalization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have complicated dualisms of high and low or of societies with or without differentiated cuisines in numerous ways beyond trade and new media. For example, the construction of national and regional cuisines, as discussed in Sobral's chapter, often both build on and subvert differences of high and low dining (Chapter 6). Such projects emerged as part of the globalized system of nation-states and are now reproduced in a transnational cultural economy of tourism and heritage (Zubaida 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009).

One process associated with globalization, which particularly complicates pre-existing culinary distinctions, is that of trans-regional and transnational migration. Transnational migration has been crucial to the redefinition of culinary hierarchies and identifications, both in migrants' countries of origin and settlement, and both among migrants themselves and other populations (Kershen 2002; Mintz 2008). Goody does not pay much attention to migration in CCC. However, in a later essay on the globalization of Chinese food he notes, particularly with reference to post-war Britain, that Chinese migrants played a key part in spreading this food to new populations, even doing 'something to offset the homogenisation of world cultures brought about by the mass production of industrial foods' (Goody 1998: 170).

Migration is central to several chapters in this volume. With reference to the impact of migration on the foodways of countries of settlement or sojourn, Sabban demonstrates that it was the demand for fresh milk among Europeans in Shanghai that led to the establishment of a Chinese dairy industry, while the taste for milk and the product itself were subsequently adopted and indigenized by local Chinese industrialists, farmers, health experts and consumers, and was initially popular especially among Chinese urban elites (Chapter 9).

Focusing instead on the experiences of migrants themselves, Pottier's discussion of Bangladeshi restaurateurs in East London demonstrates ways in which the migration process may complicate previous class hierarchies and their expressions through food (Chapter 8). Pottier traces the history of Bangladeshi restaurants in East London, showing how in recent years these restaurants have come to both reinforce and dilute divisions within the diaspora. On the one hand, restaurants used décor and menus to target specific occupational groups, with one establishment attracting many young professionals and another catering mostly to working class men. On the other hand, these restaurants contributed to a blurring of hierarchical divisions by aiding in the construction of often regionally based networks.

It is important to emphasize, to return to a discussion introduced earlier in this section, that the proliferation of new foods and cooking styles brought about by the intensification since the nineteenth century of transnational migration, trade, (gastro-)nationalism and other aspects of globalization in Western societies has not amounted simply to a levelling of 'high' and 'low' and a greater 'democratization' of taste. Rather, as Johnston and Baumann argue in their recent study of North American 'foodies', the contemporary American 'foodscape' reveals simultaneous tendencies towards both democratization and social distinction: 'While

there is a democratic notion that everybody should have access to good food, and that “anybody can be a foodie,” the most highly valued foods and food experiences – the foods that provide maximum distinction – are far from universally available’ (Johnston and Baumann 2010: 14).

Moreover, as this volume shows, these kinds of contradictions and complexities are not unique to ‘Western’ societies. Abbots, for instance, describes how multiple patterns of migration to and from the Cuenca region in Ecuador, including the labour migration of male peasants to the United States and the in-migration of North American retirees in search of healthier and more ‘authentic’ lifestyles, have come to challenge established social hierarchies and their expression through culinary forms (Chapter 5). In place of a single hierarchy that graded people and their foods in relation to their perceived closeness to the (former) colonial centre, Spain, the intensification of movement to and from the region of people, foods and remittances has created spaces for redefinition and contestations over social divisions (see Wilk 2006 on similar processes in Belize). These contestations are expressed among other things through culinary practices and interpretations of what constitutes (or should constitute) ‘typical’ local foods.

## **Comparison and food globalization**

So – in places as geographically far-flung as Highland Ecuador (Abbots, Chapter 5), Hong Kong (Watson, Chapter 2), Kumasi (Clark, Chapter 3) and coastal South India (Staples, Chapter 4) – migration, trade and other aspects of globalization have contributed to the remaking of local foodways and the redefinition of social hierarchies and identities and their expressions through food. Grasping the complexities of these different regional contexts requires careful attention to local histories and ethnographic attention to the minutiae of everyday and ritual practices and their changing meanings. Arguably, it also requires a comparative perspective.

Comparison has been central to Goody’s anthropology, including *CCC*, which significantly is subtitled *A Study in Comparative Sociology*. Yet by the time of the publication of *CCC* the search through comparison for general principles of cultural life and social development had become unfashionable among many social and cultural anthropologists (Holy 1987). An important reason for this unease with comparison was the growing recognition that the ‘cultures’ or ‘societies’ that anthropologists had previously described and compared as more or less bounded entities had in fact been interconnected for centuries. In *Europe and*

*the People without History*, a book that was published the same year as CCC, Eric Wolf (1982) even argued that many of anthropologists' 'native cultures' were in fact the products of European political and economic expansion since the sixteenth century. Goody was very much involved in these debates, and like Wolf's book, CCC is indebted to work in the Marxist anthropology of the 1970s on non-capitalist modes of production and their possible 'articulation' with the capitalist mode of production following the expansion of European colonialism and capitalism (Bloch 1983); this discussion is evident, for example, in Goody's account of cultural 'diglossia' in post-independence Ghana. Nevertheless, while Wolf's book tackles the problem of comparison with the 'world system' head-on (albeit problematically not without holding on to rather rigid social typologies – see Asad 1987), Goody sidesteps the possible implications of growing 'global' interconnections – even prior to the spread of industrial foods that Goody locates in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – for the viability of grand comparisons such as those between Africa and Eurasia or across Eurasia.

Yet despite the critiques by Wolf and others, comparison has not gone away in anthropology – or, for that matter, in history – and some scholars have observed a renewed interest in recent years (Yengoyan 2006; Gingrich 2012). Goody has himself continued to develop his comparative project. In particular, he has built on his historical comparisons of Eurasian societies, making important contributions to recent discussions concerning the origins and development of the modern world system. These contributions have emphasized the significance of East Asia in these processes and sought to undermine the parochialism of much Euro-American social science (e.g., Goody 1996; 2004; cf. Wong 1997; Pomeranz 2000).

As mentioned above, the writers in this volume do not follow the comparative method of CCC. But they do take a comparative approach to their subject matter. The kind of comparison they carry out is akin to that described by Fox (2002) as the 'study of historical transformation'. Each author takes a core institution or thing (or set of things), such as national cuisine (Sobral, Chapter 6), pork (Watson, Chapter 2), cow's milk (Sabban, Chapter 9), alcoholic beverages (Zubaida, Chapter 10) or even indigestion (Mennell, Chapter 7), and follows their movements over time within or between specific nation-states, territories, cities or larger regions. By comparing these core things at different moments in time and sometimes across space, the authors shed light on social and culinary changes in the respective localities studied, particularly as shaped by wider, transnational movements of foods and other goods,

people, capital, images and ideas. Moreover, when juxtaposed to one another and read in a comparative vein, the chapters in this volume also provide more general insights into food globalization since the nineteenth century and its relationship to the social dynamics of food consumption.

One set of insights emerges through the authors' descriptions of everyday food practices in far-flung parts of the world. These suggest the recurrence or spread of specific material practices of food enabled by trade liberalization, transnational migration and the use of new technologies in food production, distribution and storage. These include the following: the growing consumption of white rice both in regions with long histories of wet-rice agriculture (Watson, Chapter 2; Staples, Chapter 4; Clark, Chapter 3) and in non-rice producing parts of the world (Abbots, Chapter 5); the greater access to and affordability of animal flesh (Watson, Chapter 2), not least chicken (Staples, Chapter 4; Abbots, Chapter 5); the rise not only of transnational fast food chains but also of a range of more localized variants (Clark, Chapter 3; Pottier, Chapter 8; Watson, Chapter 2); the attraction of snack foods and snack-based meals, not least in restaurants (Zubaida, Chapter 10; Pottier, Chapter 8; Clark, Chapter 3; Staples, Chapter 4); and the popularity of indigenized Chinese restaurants and foods not only in the 'West' (Goody 1998) but also in South Asia (Staples, Chapter 4) and Africa (Clark, Chapter 3).

The observation of these recurrences in eating practices emerges not from some teleological notion of 'globalization' as a unifying force (Tsing 2000; Cooper 2001) – on which more below – but rather from the authors' careful ethnographic and historical documentation of people's lived experiences. Indeed, the authors' descriptions of everyday eating and drinking index changing scholarly understandings of transnational connections as well as historical shifts in the patterns of such connections themselves. The nineteenth- and early-mid twentieth-century 'world system' described in CCC depicts cultural flows emanating from the North Atlantic 'centre' towards the 'peripheries' in the colonies and post-colonial 'third world' – a pattern grounded in existing political-economic structures and partly reflected in this volume in Sabban's account of milk in China. This centre-periphery model of cultural globalization (Hannerz 1987) is complicated however by the complex directions of culinary influences described in Zubaida's and Sobral's historical chapters on the Middle East and Portugal, Chapters 10 and 6 respectively, while chapters focusing on more recent decades (e.g., Abbots, Chapter 5; Pottier, Chapter 8; Staples, Chapter 4; Clark, Chapter 3;

Watson, Chapter 2) convey an even greater sense of a multiplicity of overlapping centres and peripheries of culinary influence (Bestor 2001).

Another substantive insight provided in these chapters, which relates to the observation of transnationally recurring food practices and changing patterns of culinary cultural influence, has to do with the relationship between the 'local' and the 'cosmopolitan' in contemporary foodways. Goody argues that foreign goods and styles have been central to the creation of haute cuisines, noting: 'In terms of class and cuisine, the higher the hierarchy, the wider the contacts, the broader the view' (1982: 105). Indeed, the search for 'exotic' spices and other delicacies for elite consumption in Europe, China and elsewhere has historically served as an impetus for global trade, travel, exploration, conquest and migration (e.g., Mintz 1985; Freedman 2012; Tagliacozzo and Chang 2011; Goody, this volume). Yet as several chapters here illustrate, the role of the foreign has – at different moments in different places – become complicated by the proliferation and greater accessibility not only of foreign foods but of avenues (including tourism, new media and transnational migration) for acquiring knowledge about foreign styles.

This does not, of course, mean that there is no longer a connection between cosmopolitan food tastes and social hierarchies – indeed it is often profound (see, e.g., Klein 2006) – but that the use of any food or food style to create social distance may be open to negotiation and that in some contexts the most 'humble' of local foods may become the most powerful marker of social distinction (Leitch 2003). While haute cuisines have, it appears, always incorporated and transformed regional foods (Goody 1982: 105), such regional foods seem to be acquiring a new status, increasingly backed by national and supranational geographic protection regimes (West 2013). Around the globe – in places including Hong Kong (Watson, Chapter 2), Portugal (Sobral, Chapter 6) and Ecuador (Abbots, Chapter 5) – once ordinary or ridiculed 'peasant' foods and foodways have acquired new symbolic and economic value as signifiers of heritage, place and authenticity (Wilk 2006), even to the extent that farmers and other locals may no longer be able to afford them (Pilcher 2002). Again, while the chapters in this volume point to convergences in food globalization, they also simultaneously suggest divergences: the 'heritagization' of food may not be the same everywhere. In Portugal, as Sobral shows us in Chapter 6, the European Union and the Portuguese state have taken central roles in the process. In Hong Kong, as Watson tells us in Chapter 2, it is intimately connected to urbanization and in-migration, while in the Ecuadorean Highlands (Abbots, Chapter 5) it cannot be comprehended without close attention

to the intricacies of class, race and both emigration and immigration. The phenomenon of food heritagization has received growing attention and is likely to preoccupy anthropologists of food in the coming years.

A further general point that emerges from this volume has to do with the significance of recent forms of food globalization for understanding culinary diversity and standardization. The serious engagement in these chapters with the complexities of local patterns of food consumption and their connections with wider processes helps us to move beyond once important but increasingly unproductive debates surrounding 'homogenization' versus 'localization' (e.g., Ritzer 2004; Watson 2006). While the roles played by, for example, international trade regimes, transnational agribusinesses and food corporations in shaping 'local' consumption practices – and in many instances converging these with those of other places – cannot, as pointed out above, be overlooked, it also makes little sense to talk about these institutions as part of a unified and homogenizing 'global food system'. Rather, the findings in these chapters reinforce Wilk's (2006; cf. Bryant, Bush and Wilk 2013) important point that 'localization' and 'globalization' are everywhere dialectically interconnected processes, which play out differently in specific places and change over time.

### **Food consumption in global perspective**

Because food globalization is an ongoing process, researching the social dynamics of food consumption in global perspective is necessarily an unfinished project. Therefore, in addition to substantive insights into food globalization since the nineteenth century, collectively the authors in this volume build on Goody's work in *CCC* to contribute to the development of a framework for furthering this ongoing project. One crucial element of this framework is ethnographic fieldwork. In recent decades, a variety of methodological models have been put forward for studying food in relation to 'globalization' and transnational processes. These include multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), the study of food social biographies and commodity chains (Mintz 1985; Belasco and Horowitz 2009; Pritchard 2013) and new forms of transnational collaborative ethnographic research (Matsutake Worlds 2009). The undeniable value of these approaches should not blind us to the enduring strengths of in-depth ethnographic fieldwork in a single setting for developing a nuanced understanding of changes and continuities in food practices, as Goody himself demonstrated through his own field research in Ghana. These strengths are apparent in several of the chapters here, not least

where the author has been following a community or locality over a period of several decades (Watson, Chapter 2; Clark, Chapter 3; Staples, Chapter 4). Traditional, in-depth anthropological fieldwork is of course not simply an alternative to other methods but can be fruitfully combined with them.

Another crucial element of this framework consists of the need for historical perspectives to avoid simplistic pronouncements about food globalization. Thus, Sabban demonstrates in her chapter that the interest of milk in contemporary China cannot simply be seen as a response to the recent 'opening up' of the economy of the People's Republic but that its meanings and material culture have been shaped over many decades and indeed centuries (Chapter 9). Similarly, Sobral shows in Chapter 6 that the recent celebration of Portuguese cuisine needs to be understood against the backdrop of a longer history of 'nationalizing' Portuguese cuisine, not least during the Salazar dictatorship. Mennell argues that widespread twentieth-century English aversions to certain foods need to be seen in relation to both nineteenth-century medical manuals and a more long-term 'civilizing process'.

A third, necessary element of this project is the development of far-reaching comparative perspectives, as highlighted in the previous section. This is not least crucial in order to build on Goody's aforementioned concern with de-parochializing Western social theories of 'modernity' and 'globalization'. For example, discussions of 'heritage foods' and 'gastronationalism' (DeSoucey 2010) have been conducted almost entirely within Euro-American contexts. Yet in this volume, as mentioned above, we find processes of food 'heritagization' going on in Hong Kong and Ecuador, as well as in Portugal. How might these cases illuminate each other and further shape debates?

An additional important element of this research framework builds on Goody's discussions of literacy and consists of a close attention to the ways in which food practices are mediated through forms such as cookbooks (Sobral, Chapter 6), medical manuals (Mennell, Chapter 7), advertising (Sabban, Chapter 9), internet fora and news media (Watson, Chapter 2). Further, scholars of food consumption should pay close attention to the material dimensions of food and drink, which include not only Goody's productive processes but also the human body. This involves investigating, among other things, bodily practices of cooking, eating and serving (Staples, Chapter 4; Pottier, Chapter 8); the effects and feelings of hunger and the fear or famine; and – as discussed by Mennell in Chapter 7 – the (perceived) digestive consequences of overeating or of eating certain foods (see also Abbots and Lavis 2013).

Last, Goody's legacy as proclaimed by Mintz at the beginning of this chapter must not be forgotten. CCC's examination of 'the many-sided relationship between food and the rest of culture' (Mintz 1989: 185) is central to the project. If CCC marked a 'turning point' in the development of the anthropology of food and eating in this respect 30 years ago, the insistence on studying food in context, in respect of the complexities of that relationship with the rest of culture, remains as centrally important today. Taken together, the chapters in this book seek to keep alive the sense of the turning point in the anthropology of food that CCC represents to address the social dynamics of food in global perspective.

Research into food consumption in global perspective will continue to require careful ethnographic and historical explorations of everyday and ritual practices of cooking, eating, sharing food and talking and writing about food. It will also demand an attention to the materiality of food in relation to both the body and the wider productive processes that include food production, distribution and disposal, processes which may not always be apparent to food 'consumers' themselves. And not least, it will involve a comparative perspective that will reveal both convergences and divergences in global foodways. The publication, some 30 years ago, of *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* was a key moment in the development of this ongoing project.

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## Note

1. This introduction has benefitted greatly from Anne Murcott's comments and suggestions. The author is of course responsible for remaining shortcomings in the text.

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## 2

# Meat: A Cultural Biography in (South) China<sup>1</sup>

*James L. Watson*

Meat – specifically pork – is the most highly prized item in Chinese cuisine. Shortages of pork spark street disorders, initiate bank runs and (if allowed to continue too long) threaten the stability of the state. Many countries, including the United States and Britain, maintain strategic petroleum reserves. China has a strategic pork reserve.<sup>2</sup> Pork plays a leading role in Chinese ancestral rites, wedding banquets, funeral rituals, graduation celebrations and communist party festivities. Pork, in other words, is central to all discussions of food in the Chinese world.

This chapter focuses on the gradual transformation of meat (pig flesh) from a restricted item of exchange to a commodity readily obtainable at shops, street stalls and supermarkets. Meat, I argue, has a cultural biography that changes over time, depending on economic, political and social circumstances. The following sections track the social history of meat in the Cantonese-speaking regions of the Pearl River Delta, Guangdong Province.

Before proceeding, it is important to keep in mind a central fact: meat is dead animal flesh. In the absence of modern refrigeration technology, meat (especially pork) lasts only a few hours before it has to be processed into edible food. Furthermore, meat is messy. Pigs have to be killed, bled and butchered – a complex set of procedures that requires the services of an experienced butcher. The high-pitched keening of a stuck pig, caught in its death throes, is a sound – once heard – that can never be forgotten. Meat, in other words, is a by-product of death. But meat is also the means by which human rituals are sustained and community solidarity reaffirmed. This is true whether we are discussing Swedish smorgasbord in Illinois or Cantonese ancestral rites in Hong Kong.

## 'Meat': an ethnographic and etymological excursion

The Chinese term for 'meat' (肉 Mandarin *rou*, Cantonese *yuk*) has a complex genealogy. The default of this character – and its primary denotation – refers to pork; in south China people do not have to insert the prefix *zhu* (豬 pig) when they speak of pork (see also Zhou 2001: 257–258). It is only when one introduces other forms of mammalian flesh that a qualifier is required, as in *niu rou* (牛肉 beef) or *yang rou* (羊肉 lamb/mutton). Until their recent appearance in Chinese supermarkets, beef and lamb played marginal roles in south China's local cuisines. Other than pork, the alternative forms of meat available in pre-modern times were water buffalo<sup>3</sup> (an almost inedible, impossible to chew dish), dog<sup>4</sup> (consumed by elderly males as a winter warmer), domestic cat<sup>5</sup> (for eye problems and arthritis) and a local variety of wild civet<sup>6</sup> (an aphrodisiac). In everyday conversations, all of these 'meats' required the suffix *rou* to distinguish the butchered from the live animal.

Most village households raised a handful of chickens but seldom ate them at home; they were far too valuable and were sold for cash in nearby market towns (see Liu 2008). Duck, goose and pigeon were also available in markets but entered village cuisine only on rare, ceremonial occasions. The suffix *rou* (meat) was not used when speaking of poultry; for most rural people, bird flesh was consumed in soups, health dishes and as a condiment for banquet dishes. Another rare, but nonetheless significant, category of animal flesh was snake<sup>7</sup> – an aphrodisiac that did not require the *rou* suffix.

Shrimp, crab and oysters were produced in great quantities along the estuaries of the Pearl River Delta but, like poultry, these high-value foods were sold to wholesalers. Low quality, dried/salted fish was a dietary staple, although it was never a preferred item.<sup>8</sup> Ordinary villagers consumed oysters once each year, during the annual celebration for the local patron goddess (天后 Tianhou, 'Empress of Heaven'). All forms of meat and poultry are banned during this three- to five-day festival, on the assumption that Tianhou would be offended by the killing. During the festival, villagers eat only vegetarian foods, which – in the local view – includes oysters. Oysters are 'planted' by inserting stones into prepared mudflats, and they 'grow' like plants as the polyps develop; hence, the mature oyster is perceived to be a vegetable rather than an animal (see Liu 1995: 85).

The sheep category of meat presents an interesting commentary on the overpowering significance of pork in China. Sheep were not raised in the delta region, primarily because of a lack of pasturage and a

preference for other forms of meat. In the 1960s and 1970s, lamb was available as an imported item (from New Zealand, Australia and north China) in a handful of Muslim restaurants located in the cities of Guangzhou and Kowloon.<sup>9</sup> The hegemony of pork in southern and central China presented special problems for Muslim merchants and travellers, as well as Orthodox Jews who worked in China. Lard is everywhere in China. It was, and still is, nearly impossible to avoid – even, or perhaps especially, in vegetarian restaurants where it is commonly used for cooking and seasoning. Chinese packaged foods often contain lard, although it is rarely mentioned in the list of ingredients.<sup>10</sup> The Chinese term *qingzhen* (清真 ‘pure and true’) is roughly equivalent to *halal* – an Arabic concept that means ‘lawful’ and governs food consumption in Muslim societies. In everyday usage *qingzhen* refers to food items that are free of lard or pig by-products (Gillette 2000a: 118–138; Gladney 1991: 7–15). Pork thus dominates all aspects of life in China, even among minorities who try their best to avoid it.<sup>11</sup>

### The setting: Cantonese rural society

In 1898, Britain leased a 365-square-mile section of Guangdong Province from China’s Manchu court and attached it to the Crown Colony of Hong Kong (established in 1842). The indigenous villagers in this coastal enclave – known as the ‘New Territories’ – lived under British colonial rule for 99 years, reverting (along with the urban portions of the colony) to Chinese control on 1 July 1997. New Territories residents thus escaped the Maoist land reforms, collectivization campaigns and Cultural Revolution chaos that swept through China from the 1950s to the late 1970s. Colonial officials vigorously enforced an English-style legal system and collected land taxes without fail, but indigenous rites and religious activities continued unabated in the New Territories. Communist authorities in Guangdong Province, just across the Hong Kong border, denounced such practices as ‘feudal’ and launched a series of anti-superstition campaigns to eradicate any vestige of religious activity. By the late 1950s or early 1960s, the ritual system that underpinned Cantonese rural society had effectively disappeared in most parts of south China.

The villagers described in this chapter have sustained their indigenous ritual system – with minimal interference from state authorities – for at least 300 years, and probably much longer. This chapter draws on 45 years of ethnographic research centering on two Cantonese communities (San Tin 新田 and Ha Tsuen 厦村) located in Yuen Long District,

north-west New Territories, near the frontier between Hong Kong and Guangdong Province. Today the booming city of Shenzhen is just north of this border. San Tin and Ha Tsuen are representative of the landowning, politically connected communities that controlled this region since at least the Ming dynastic era (fourteenth century). Residents claim to be descendants of ethnic Han pioneers who fled to the Pearl River Delta in the immediate aftermath of the Mongol conquests of central China (twelfth and thirteenth centuries).

San Tin and Ha Tsuen are excellent examples of what sinological anthropologists refer to as lineage villages: the vast majority of male residents in these communities trace descent from a common founding ancestor. Circumstances in the New Territories have changed in recent decades, and more 'outsiders' (non-lineage families) have moved into villages of this type. Until the 1980s, San Tin was dominated by descendants of a pioneer named Man Sai-go and, hence, share the surname *Man* (文 Mandarin *Wen*). Most of the men in Ha Tsuen are descended from a *Teng* (鄧 Mandarin *Deng*) ancestor and carry his surname (see J. Watson 1975a; R. Watson 1985). Members of the Man and the Teng lineages follow a strict rule of patrilocal residence, meaning that all wives marry-in from other patrilineages and all daughters marry-out of their natal villages. For nearly four centuries the Man and the Teng – together with three other patrilineages – exchanged wives as they maintained a wary stand-off, competing among themselves for land, water and dominance of the local markets.

### The rarity of meat-eating in the Cantonese heartland

The closed nature of Cantonese lineage structures led to a high degree of intra-village solidarity and an ideology of equality within the closed kinship group. But, as Rubie Watson has demonstrated, lineage-based communities were, in fact, riven by class and status distinctions (R. Watson 1985: 98–136). These differences were reflected, perhaps most clearly, in diet: households of wealthy landlord-merchants ate meat three or four times each week, whereas the households of ordinary villagers (farmers, tenants, workers) rarely consumed meat in contexts other than ancestral rituals or community celebrations. Meat, in other words, was a primary class marker in this part of south China: to eat meat on a regular basis, at home or in nearby market towns, was a clear and unambiguous sign of wealth.<sup>12</sup>

At the bottom of the local class hierarchy were residents of small, often ramshackle villages scattered along the coastal margins of the

New Territories and the Pearl River Delta. Settlements of this type were inhabited by landless tenants, lime smelters, oyster fieldworkers, reed mat weavers, pond monitors, reclamation dike builders, duck herders and fisher-people (boat and shoreline specialists). The farmers and landlords of San Tin and Ha Tsuen looked down on these people and treated them as transients, even though many had lived in the region for generations (see J. Watson 1977; Liu 1995).

Residents of such communities claimed to have gone for years – up to five years according to one tenant farmer – without eating even a trace of meat during the early twentieth century. It is not that residents of these small settlements were starving, or had an exceptionally meagre or unhealthy diet – quite the contrary, in fact. Their diet included fish (fresh and dried-salted), vegetables (varieties of cabbage) and sweet potatoes (the primary source of starch) but little, if any, rice – another dietary item they craved. Locally produced shrimp, crab and oysters – as noted earlier – were shipped to nearby seafood markets for sale.

During my interviews in the 1960s and 1970s, meat was a delicate topic in these villages. The mere mention of food set off long-winded (and very loud), public ‘testimonies’ by older residents for the benefit of younger neighbours: ‘When I first married into this place, we went for years without eating even a single scrap of meat. It was terrible! What kind of life is that?’ asked a 70-year-old widow during a 1977 encounter. Another villager proclaimed: ‘I remember going for months without even smelling lard. Can any of my grandchildren imagine that? Like a lot of other people here we could not afford meat, but not having lard was the hardest, cruellest of fates’.

Levels of meat consumption varied in China, but – until the early twenty-first century – it was never plentiful. John Buck, in his 1920s study of Chinese farm economies, notes that American farmers received 39 times as much food energy from animal products as their counterparts in China (Buck 1930: 364). The environmental historian Vaclav Smil analysed Buck’s monumental collection of household data (Buck 1937) and concludes that most rural Chinese ate meat only two or three times each year (Smil 2002: 608). European farm families fared somewhat better, but meat was always a luxury in the countryside (Weber 1976: 141–142). Excessive consumption of meat, so often reported in European historical lore, was restricted to urban elites and imperial courts (see Braudel 1973: 124–135). The majority of farmers in early twentieth-century France ate meat only at Easter, Saints’ festivals and the occasional weddings (Smil 2002: 607).

## Spheres of exchange, I: pigs from the ancestors

For ordinary villagers in the Pearl River Delta, the distribution of meat, prior to the 1960s, constituted a restricted sphere of exchange<sup>13</sup> – a closed circle defined by descent from a specific ancestor or long-term residence in a community. The most important of these domains was the ancestor worship cult. Every autumn, during the Double Nine Festival (the ninth of the ninth lunar month) male elders gathered at the tombs of key ancestors to commemorate the dead and distribute portions of pork. The custom is called *fen ju yuk* (分猪肉), a colloquial Cantonese term that means ‘dividing/sharing pig meat’. Whole, gutted and cleaned pigs are required for the rites, which are conducted in front of the tomb – to demonstrate, in a quite literal sense, the good fortune of the ancestor. The pigs are purchased by the ancestor, through the agency of his landed estate (managed by a committee of descendants). Ancestors who ‘survive’ as named, individuated personalities beyond four or five generations after death must have their own income – generated by rental fields, commercial property and long-term investments (in recent decades this includes stocks, bonds and mutual funds). Estate income is used (1) to pay for annual shares of pork at autumn tomb rites; (2) to provide annual dividends (in cash) to living descendants; and (3) to pay for the upkeep of ancestral halls, the maintenance of schools and scholarships honouring the named ancestor. In 1905, there were 126 ancestral estates in San Tin and 82 estates in Ha Tsuen; most of these estates remain intact today.

The pigs presented at the tomb are the symbolic manifestations of the ancestor’s property and his continued attention to the corporal needs of living descendants. The balance in the relationship is heavily weighted on the side of the living because, under special circumstances, descendants can agree to sell their ancestor’s property and divide the proceeds.<sup>14</sup> Ancestors must therefore deliver regular benefits to the living: ‘If there were no pigs’, a Man elder told me during the 1970 autumn tomb rites, ‘no one would be here and there would be no ancestors’. When an estate is in financial trouble, all secondary and tertiary expenditures cease: the last thing to go is the pork. If no one appears at the autumn rites, the ancestor dies a second, more serious death – the final expiration of his spirit (神 *shen*).<sup>15</sup> Property may outlast individual life, but it is not eternal. During interviews, villagers confessed that they found spiritual extinction far more frightening than mere biological death (see J. Watson 1982).

Individual shares of pork varied in size depending upon the wealth of the estate and the number of descendants involved. In the 1960s and

1970s the larger estates, named in honour of apical ancestors (some of whom died 40 generations ago), had thousands of shareholders, each receiving no more than two or three ounces of pork (see, e.g., R. Watson 1988: 222–226). The wealthiest estates in San Tin and Ha Tsuen, on the other hand, distributed up to ten catties (13 English pounds, approximately 6.5 kilos) of meat per share – in addition to substantial cash dividends to each living descendant. Estates of this type often had only a handful of shareholders; the dividends were used to underwrite business and professional expenses, thereby reinforcing the recipients' privileged positions in the community. For members of this class, the meat was an afterthought – although they were always careful to collect their allotments to verify their status as shareholders.

Depending upon one's position within the hierarchy of lineage segments, lucky villagers received four or five portions of meat during the autumn rites. Others collected a single share from the apical ancestor's estate and nothing more. During the 1960s and 1970s, the majority of shareholders in San Tin and Ha Tsuen received approximately two catties (2.6 English pounds, rather more than a kilo) of ancestral pork during the autumn rites and a smaller share (0.3 pounds or less) to mark the Lunar New Year.<sup>16</sup>

The meat distribution system privileged age over status: elders (men aged 61 or over) received one extra share in recognition of their senior status in the lineage. Those lucky enough to reach the age of 71 received two extra shares; at the age of 81, three shares; and at the age of 91 (rare until recently) an elder was granted five<sup>17</sup> extra shares. Most estates in San Tin and Ha Tsuen had only enough money to provide shares for elders, who in turn redistributed some of the meat to their sons and nephews. The wealthiest estates gave meat (and dividends) to every living, male descendant of the donor ancestor – including infants.

One never asked (as the author soon learned during his first field trip), 'How many shares (*fen*) did you get this year?' After butchering, the meat was divided and shares were weighed with exacting detail to ensure equal distribution<sup>18</sup>; elders then collected their allotments and carried them home for cooking. Neighbours always knew who received the most meat, but this was not a topic of public discussion.

## Spheres of exchange, II: community banquets

The distribution of pork associated with the ancestor worship cult was closed to non-members. It was also unequal and hierarchical, in the sense that some people received more meat – and cash dividends – than

others. The educated, wealthy males who managed Cantonese lineages cultivated an ideology of egalitarianism ('we are all equal in the eyes of the ancestors'), but this was an obvious fiction, unmasked most clearly in the division of ancestral pork.

Fortunately for the average villager, there were other, more equal means of distributing meat in the community: frequent banquets to celebrate weddings, births, adoptions, housewarmings and the 'return' of emigrants who had spent years working abroad.<sup>19</sup> These banquets also constituted a restricted sphere of exchange in the sense that the events were open only to invited guests, who were expected to reciprocate when the occasion warranted. Money was not at issue and entry to the banquet hall could not be purchased.

Referred to in Cantonese as *puhn-choi* (盤菜 'pot/basin dining'), village banquets were defiantly egalitarian and violated elite Chinese dining conventions. There were no toasts or speeches; guests were fed on a first-come, first-served basis. They ate and departed, without thanking the host or lingering to talk with neighbours. The protocol was to eat quickly and make room for the next wave of diners (J. Watson 1987: 107–108). The host family was expected to invite at least one person from each household in their hamlet – a named subdivision within the larger village complex (San Tin had eight hamlets and Ha Tsuen had seven). Hamlet residents knew each other intimately and cooperated to perform various rites to protect the neighbourhood; each hamlet also maintained an informal village watch, consisting of older women who rarely left their hamlet and were not afraid to challenge strangers.

Banquet invitations took the form of public notices posted on a hamlet wall reserved for this purpose: 'The family of Man Dak-sam is calling-in a daughter-in-law [i.e., celebrating the marriage of a local-born son] on the fifth of the third lunar month. Elders of Fan Tin Tsuen [a hamlet in San Tin] are invited to attend'.<sup>20</sup> Everyone in the hamlet knew about the wedding weeks in advance, but the public posting was part of the formal rites. As specified in the announcement, each household was expected to send a designated eater – usually a male elder (age 60 or over) who 'ate for' the household. If a household did not have an elder capable of attending, a male substitute could be sent to eat in his stead. By consuming the food the household representative conferred his (and his family's) recognition of the marriage, birth, or adoption being celebrated.<sup>21</sup>

At wedding banquets during the 1960s and 1970s, special guests were seated at designated tables. This party included members of the groom's family (including his mother, paternal grandmother and mother's

brother), representatives of the bride's family (primarily male),<sup>22</sup> local political leaders and police officers from the nearest station. A group of female 'bride-callers' and 'bride-senders' who accompanied the bride (see R. Watson 1985: 121–123) also sat at reserved tables. The largest group – elders and household representatives – did not have assigned tables and ate wherever they could find a seat. Hamlet women who helped prepare the food and clean the banquet hall, along with an unruly scrum of hungry children, ate in the kitchen or in the alley behind the building. Every morsel of food, every dollop of sauce, vanished during banquets the author attended in the 1960s and 1970s. Nothing, other than picked bones, was left for the ravenous watchdogs that lurked on the sidelines.

Banquet fare was – and still is in some parts of the New Territories – a specially prepared concoction of local foods, the most important of which was boiled pork (roast pork was a later innovation, starting in the late 1960s). Nine basic ingredients were cooked separately and combined into a large wooden basin: fat-back pork, small portions of chicken (as a garnish), white turnips, dried salt fish, fresh fish, ground fish balls, dried (reconstituted) pork skin, dried bean curd skin and dried (reconstituted) squid.<sup>23</sup> All of these items, save for the turnips used as filler and the salt fish, were considered delicacies by villagers. Chefs were always male, usually local villagers who prided themselves in their skills and their secret blend of spices that made the food palatable.<sup>24</sup> These men never cooked meals in their own homes, delegating that task to their wives or daughters-in-law. An important feature of common-pot dining was its obvious egalitarian overtones: everyone ate from the same basin, using chopsticks to search out and seize prize pieces of pork or chicken. This type of dining defies the normal procedures of Chinese dining: wedding banquets in urban settings featured nine<sup>25</sup> separate dishes, eaten in sequence as they are delivered by staff waiting on diners at table. During the 1960s and 1970s, educated urbanites considered village banqueting to be crude, backward and dangerous to one's health (see J. Watson 2011: 45).

The primary attraction of common-pot dining was the opportunity to eat meat – other ingredients, including the fish, were consumed after the pork was gone. Older guests, the majority of whom had lost most of their teeth,<sup>26</sup> preferred to chew on cubes of fat rather than portions of boiled meat. It was, in fact, the fat rather than meat (red-muscle fibre) that most villagers craved during hard times.<sup>27</sup> Fatty pork was sometimes dangerous for elders who were not used to regular meat consumption. In San Tin during the 1950s and 1960s, elders often became

ill after consuming large pieces of congealed fat, no doubt suffering from gallbladder complications.

### The sexual division of eating

In terms of overall meat consumption, common-pot dining was far more significant to larger numbers of villagers than the pork distributed by ancestral estates. Without these banquets, many women in San Tin and Ha Tsuen (prior to 1970) would rarely have eaten meat, if ever. There was, in other words, a sexual division in respect to eating: men consumed more meat than women; boys were privileged over girls; and mothers always ate last.<sup>28</sup> The percentage of meat calories in the overall diet (prior to the 1980s) was relatively low, which means that the sexual differential probably had little effect on long-term health – but the social distinction between meat-eating males and meat-deprived females was an accepted and unchallenged feature of Cantonese village life.

There were also cosmological considerations that governed meat consumption. Pork from the ancestors was – according to leading elders – reserved for the exclusive benefit of male descendants. The pigs were displayed in front of the ancestor's tomb for approximately one hour, during which time the spiritual power, or 'essence' (*qi* 氣), of the ancestor was said to transform the meat and 'makes it special',<sup>29</sup> to quote one well-informed San Tin elder. Other elders claimed that consumption of the ancestral pork was essential if men hoped to reproduce the next generation of lineage males. Women were (theoretically) proscribed from eating any of this special pork, although it was invariably women who cooked it once the men brought it home – and, according to village friends, female cooks often ate some in the privacy of their kitchens.

In his classic study, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class*, Jack Goody (1982) argues that Eurasia – and China in particular – is marked by hierarchical divisions between the sexes; West Africa, by contrast, is less rigidly divided in this respect. He claims that the sexual differential is most evident in the closely connected realms of marriage and diet: 'Where women are endowed [with dowry] and ranked [as claimants in the inheritance system], they tend to eat with men of equal status, enjoying the same cuisine' (1982: 11). Cantonese marriage customs are highly complex (involving both dowry and bridewealth), but unlike the West African systems studied by Goody, dowry in south China is a privilege – not a right (R. Watson 1981: 607–609). Furthermore, Cantonese women in the New Territories did not – until 1994 – have legal rights to inherit

any of their fathers' property (R. Watson 2011); rights to ancestral estate properties is another matter altogether (discussed below).

Cantonese village women had few of the dietary privileges enjoyed by the women in Goody's study. West African women may have eaten separately from men on ritual occasions, but there were few 'inhibitions of eating together [in public]' (Goody 1982: 111). Prior to the 1970s, San Tin and Ha Tsuen women rarely ate with men outside the home. When women attended the village banquets, they usually sat at separate tables. Rubie Watson discovered that older, post-menopausal women sometimes removed a basin of banquet food from the public hall and carried it to another location where it was consumed in isolation from male diners.<sup>30</sup> The teahouses that village men frequented in nearby market towns were male-only domains; women worked in the kitchens and carried food in these establishments, but until the late twentieth century women did not eat there. Starting in the 1970s, village women (always accompanied by male family members) attended formal wedding banquets in market town restaurants designed specifically for this purpose. The introduction of Western-style fast food restaurants in the 1990s altered the culinary landscape in a fundamental way: for the first time, village women of all ages felt comfortable enough to eat by themselves, or in female-only groups, at McDonald's and KFC (J. Watson 1997).

### **Meat in today's diet (A pig in every pot)**

By the late twentieth century, Deng Xiaoping's 'opening' of the Chinese economy had turned the Pearl River Delta into an affluent industrial and commercial region. The everyday diet of indigenous villagers in the delta, including the residents of San Tin and Ha Tsuen, has changed dramatically: rural Cantonese can now (should they wish to do so) eat more meat in a week than their great grandparents did in a year. In 2011, the average Chinese consumed 84 pounds of pork per annum; Americans ate 59 pounds per person during the same period (Larson 2012). The International Food Policy Research Institute estimates that by 2020, China will account for 41 per cent of all *new* demand for meat, worldwide (as well as 25 per cent of all new demand for grain to feed livestock).<sup>31</sup> In Hong Kong and the New Territories, the consumption of meat skyrocketed during the late twentieth century, rising from 170,000 tons per year in 1982 (at the beginning of Deng's economic reforms) to 254,000 tons per year in 2002.<sup>32</sup>

New Territories villagers have also joined the refrigerator/freezer revolution that has transformed dietary practices throughout the world

(see, e.g., Thevenot 1979; Staples, this volume). When refrigerators were first installed in San Tin and Ha Tsuen during the 1980s, local people used them to cool beer, soft drinks and fruit; cold storage was thought to ruin the taste of meat and vegetables. By the mid-1990s, however, villagers started eating chilled and frozen meat they had purchased in Western-style grocery stores.<sup>33</sup> High priced portions of chilled, cellophane-wrapped American pork (complete with little American flags displayed on the packaging) are now available in New Territories supermarkets. Many people buy imported pork because they are afraid to eat Chinese meat originating from hog farms in Guangdong Province, where the excessive use of antibiotics and illegal additives is common (see, e.g., Yan 2012). Beef, imported from the United States and Australia, has become a regular feature of village diets in the New Territories – although pork is still dominant.

Given these fundamental changes, village banqueting no longer has much nutritional or caloric significance. The social import of these events, however, has increased dramatically as New Territories residents seek to distinguish themselves from Chinese compatriots who are migrating to Hong Kong in search of employment and opportunity. Common-pot banquets have been appropriated as a symbol of Hong Kong's indigenous, 'local' culture. Urbanites, whose parents and grandparents were horrified at the prospect of digging into a common pot, regularly visit the New Territories to dine on upscale versions of *puhn-choi* and celebrate 'their' cultural heritage (see K. Chan 2007, 2011; S. Chan 2010; Cheung 2005).<sup>34</sup> The author was (he will admit) flabbergasted when he first encountered this cultural reinvention in the late 1980s. During repatriation ceremonies in July 1997, hundreds of *puhn-choi* banquets were held in the New Territories and in many Hong Kong urban neighbourhoods. Common-pot dining is now available in some of Hong Kong's leading restaurants – and a decidedly downmarket, simplified version is also sold in local fast food chains.

One aspect of today's common-pot banquets saddens older villagers: most of the food is discarded. Even the few remaining village dogs, pampered pets rather than the half-starved watchdogs of the past, are not interested in the leftovers. Younger diners enjoy the camaraderie of the events, but they are wary of eating too much meat (and many, especially young women, are on perpetual slimming diets). Meat – including the high-quality roast pork that has replaced the boiled pork of yesteryear – is no longer viewed as a luxury. To enhance the appeal of their banquet fare, New Territories restaurants and caterers substitute Maine lobster, Alaskan king-crab claws and exotic mushrooms for

the traditional pork. (The turnips, salt fish and reconstituted squid have long since disappeared from the common pots.)

Meanwhile, the pork shares distributed by Man and Teng ancestral estates have shrunk – dramatically in some cases. During the 2009 tomb rites for San Tin's apical ancestor, two (small) roasted pigs were divided into bite-sized portions and consumed, on-site, by the 400+ worshippers in attendance. In 1970, seven large pigs were displayed at this tomb; the pigs were then carried back to San Tin and divided into substantial, three-pound shares. In another departure from past practice, Man daughters – and even daughters-in-law – not only worshipped with their brothers and husbands during the 2009 tomb rites, they were given portions of the ancestral pork. In the 1960s and 1970s, women did not accompany male worshippers to the tomb and did not consume any of the pork (in public, at least). What matters today is not the meat, but the dividends that are still distributed to male descendants of certain ancestors. Man daughters may be commensal with their patrilineal ancestor in the sense that they consume portions of his pigs, but (as of 2010) they did not have a financial stake in his ancestral estate.<sup>35</sup>

Common-pot dining and pork-sharing assumed new, overtly political meanings in the aftermath of Hong Kong's 1997 repatriation to China. These rites now confirm one's identity as a generations-long resident of the New Territories, a status that carries certain rights and privileges – including access to Hong Kong government hospitals, schools, driving licences and resident cards. The large influx of migrants from other parts of China during recent years is perceived by many local residents as a threat to Hong Kong's distinctiveness; they fear that Hong Kong will become just another Chinese megalopolis.<sup>36</sup>

In today's political environment, the dual rites of commensality (pork-sharing and common-pot banqueting) may have retained their outward forms, but the 'meanings' of these acts have changed.<sup>37</sup> The rites were once purely local, in the sense that villagers performed them with a community audience in mind; few outside the New Territories had any interest or involvement in the banquets or the ancestral rituals. Today, in post-colonial Hong Kong, common-pot banquets and pork-sharing are public events, with print and television media covering every detail (see J. Watson 2011: 50–51). Lineage leaders take advantage of these occasions to proclaim their political rights as 'indigenous people' (*yuanjumin* 原居民), descendants of Han Chinese pioneers who settled in this part of the delta centuries before the British – or even the Manchus – arrived on the scene. The message is clear: 'We were here first, and we deserve special consideration'. The rites discussed in this

chapter have entered the realm of identity politics and, as such, they are likely to survive well into the twenty-first century, and perhaps beyond. The meat – once the centrepiece of the rituals – is still there, but it has become a prop, a convenient symbol of past glories and a reminder of hard times.

## Notes

1. Abbreviated versions of this chapter were presented as public lectures at Rutgers University (2012) and Haverford College (2013). The author thanks Maris Gillette, Jakob Klein and Rubie Watson for their helpful critiques of earlier drafts.
2. See, for example, Michael Wines, 'China Plans to Release Some of Its Pork Stockpile to Hold Down Prices', *NYTimes.com*, 15 July 2011.
3. Water buffaloes were not slaughtered until they could no longer work in the fields. In the 1960s, aged animals were sold to butchers in nearby market towns, and the meat appeared in teahouses under the menu category 'beef' (牛肉 *niu rou*). Local people knew, however, that it was not cow meat. Eating aged water buffalo is akin to chewing leather. In many parts of China, the consumption of beef (including water buffalo) was proscribed and thought to be revolting (see Swislocki 2009: 115–116).
4. Dog meat was available at local market stalls as winter stew; it was also sold in certain teahouses located in the town of Yuen Long. Given that dog meat was (theoretically) illegal in Hong Kong, it was never advertised. Dog buyers visited San Tin and Ha Tsuen in the winters and purchased puppies that had been raised specifically for the market. Buyers preferred *sam-gan gau* (三斤狗), Cantonese for 'three-catty dog' (approximately four English pounds, two kilos). The plump puppies were loaded into cages on the back of bicycles and wheeled to market – inevitably followed by a snarling pack of village dogs. Dog buying was a hazardous occupation. More will be said about village watchdogs in a subsequent essay to be published by the author.
5. Cat meat was available, in small quantities, as soup at market stalls (like puppies mentioned in note 4 above, fat kittens were preferred). Older women, notably those suffering from rheumatism or arthritis were partial to cat soup; they believed feline agility could be transferred to humans. Similarly, the soup was thought to confer better eyesight (villagers believed cats could see in the dark).
6. Wild civets are caught in the hills of the Pearl River Delta and brewed into stews or soups consumed by ageing males in search of lost sexual potency. Civets were suspected of being one of the species responsible for the SARS epidemic in 2002; the charge, however, was never proven (see Murray 2006: 23).
7. Rural Cantonese believe that snake is the most powerful aphrodisiac. Snakes caught in the marshes and hills of the Pearl River Delta are highly prized (especially the Checkered Keelback (*Xenochrophis piscator*)). In the 1970s, snake-catchers regularly visited Ha Tsuen teahouses, leaving their live captives in wire cages at the door. Snake flesh and snake gall bladders (used

as medicinals) have to be fresh killed to be effective, according to village friends. Pythons were also found in paddy fields, notably in the San Tin area, but they were harder to catch and more dangerous to handle.

8. Dried-salted fish was the dominant form of seafood consumed by ordinary Chinese until the late twentieth century (see Anderson 1972; Liu 1995). Health authorities have traced the high rate of oesophageal cancer in Hong Kong and surrounding counties to the regular consumption of salted fish (see, e.g., Yu 1986).
9. In the 1960s and early 1970s, frozen lamb from New Zealand was available in Dairy Farm stores located in Kowloon. Pakistani restaurants, catering primarily to the local Muslim community, were located in Kowloon and Victoria; two *halal* restaurants served Pakistani, Indian and Nepalese customers in the New Territories market town of Tai Po. Menus for the latter are found in Watson New Territories Digital Archive (Misc. Doc. MD075).
10. Many Chinese Muslims will not buy Chinese packaged foods because they are thought to contain lard; however, they will eat American-style 'Western' snacks (even those made in China) on the assumption that such foods are not adulterated with pork (Gillette 2000b: 80–81).
11. In the southern province of Fujian, the anthropologist Dru Gladney encountered pig farmers who are descendants of Muslim merchants. Although these farmers eat their own livestock, they do not offer pork to their long-dead Arab ancestors. This, according to Gladney, is the only remaining vestige of their Muslim heritage; in all other respects they are indistinguishable from their ethnic Han neighbours (personal communication, referring to Gladney 1987).
12. On meat and class, see also Staples (this volume).
13. Sphere of exchange refers to separate domains *within* which items (such as gifts) are exchanged, but the same items are not transferred *between* or *across* domains (Plattner 1989: 175–176; see also Bloch and Parry 1989: 12–16). The idea derives from the work of Paul Bohannan (1955), who studied the Tiv in West Africa.
14. Unfilial decisions of this nature have occurred among Cantonese villagers in the New Territories region, but such decisions are rare, given that every living descendant must agree to the sale. The larger and wealthier the group of descendants, the less likely they are to reach universal agreement on anything – least of all the decision to sell their ancestor's estate (see Potter 1968: 168; R. Watson 1985: 61–72).
15. Villagers believed that ancestral spirits (神 *shen*) had to be fed during the annual tomb rites; without this 'meal', spirits were thought to dissipate and eventually disappear. The ancestor thus had to pay not only for the pigs that fed his living descendants but also for ritual foods (boiled pork, rice, rice wine, tea, fruit and candy) that sustained his own spirit (see R. Watson 1988).
16. Weights varied year by year. Figures used in this chapter are based on data collected in 1969–1970 and 1977–1978 in the New Territories villages of San Tin and Ha Tsuen. The only period when pork was *not* distributed was during the Japanese occupation (1941–1945).
17. The number four is a homophone for 'death' (in both Cantonese and Mandarin) and is never used in the context of auspicious rites.

18. Pork shares contained (more or less) equal portions of all cuts of meat: pig's feet were cut into small pieces; slabs of red-muscle meat were balanced by lumps of fat; tails were chopped like carrots; and ears were sliced with razor blades. Smaller estates were more careful with this type of division than larger estates. See Watson New Territories Digital Archive, Photos, Pork Division section for details.
19. San Tin, in particular, had a large number of (male) emigrants who worked in the European restaurant trade. When they retired to their home villages (around age 55), they sponsored public banquets to announce their successful sojourn and their return to village life.
20. The name and date are changed, but this is a typical example of a public wedding invitation. Several photographic examples can be found in Watson New Territories Digital Archive (Misc. Doc. MD140).
21. To sit quietly and refuse to eat was a very serious challenge to the legitimacy of the marriage, birth or adoption in question. This has not happened in San Tin or Ha Tsuen since the early 1960s, when several Man elders refused to eat the *puhn-choi* provided by a wealthy man who sought recognition for the adoption of a non-lineage member as his primary heir. The elders were induced to eat (and to sign a cloth banner recognizing the adoption) after the presentation of red envelopes, each containing HK\$100 – a vast sum in those days (see J. Watson 1975a: 298–299).
22. The groom's mother's brother plays a central role in various property decisions in Cantonese lineages. Given that they have no claim on the property of their sister's husbands, they are ideal adjudicators for decisions regarding the distribution of land, commercial holdings and household goods. Rubie Watson has explored this delicate and complex relationship in the context of marriage and death rites (1981: 610–614).
23. This was the common list of items used in *puhn-choi* recipes in San Tin (1969–1970); a very similar list (with nine items) was common in Ha Tsuen (1977–1978). The quality of the ingredients varied with the relative wealth of the host family.
24. One of these spice recipes, handwritten by a Ha Tsuen chef, is preserved in the Watson New Territories Digital Archive (Misc. Doc. MD049).
25. Note the numerical parallels: urban banquets and village *puhn-choi* banquets both feature nine basic dishes – in the village case, however, the 'dishes' are cooked separately and combined in a common pot. The parallel cannot be accidental. The putative origins of *puhn-choi* are discussed in Watson 1987: 111–112.
26. The social and medical implications of early tooth loss among rural Chinese is a topic anthropologists have yet to explore; for comparative perspectives, see Zhou and Zheng (2008).
27. The craving for fat is a central theme in Marvin Harris's reconstruction of human dietary evolution (1985: 41–42). Chinese pigs were bred for heavy fat separated from red meat in a thick layer known as fatback; this contrasts with the marbling of fat throughout the carcass, as preferred by American consumers (Anderson and Anderson 1977: 337). In north China during the 1930s, pork fat was sold for twice the price of red-muscle pork (Schmalzer 2002: 19).

28. The pre-1970s meat deficit was exacerbated by the picnics held in the hills during the double-nine festival (ancestor worship season). Many small estates did not distribute pork shares, as such; instead a butchered, raw pig was carried to the relevant tomb and the meat (together with rice and vegetables) was cooked and consumed on-site. These small feasts were, by definition, male-only because women did not attend the rites (until the mid-1990s). Only the larger ancestral estates with dozens (or hundreds) of member descendants engaged in the large-scale pork divisions described in this chapter.
29. It is significant that the bones of pigs presented at ancestral tombs were buried in deep trenches outside the village. This was not true of pig bones butchered for common-pot banquets. Watchdogs waited impatiently to consume banquet leftovers, but it was considered inappropriate for dogs to feed on pig bones that had been used during ancestral rites. Elsewhere I have argued that there is a cosmological connection between the human bones preserved in ancestral tombs and the flesh of pigs used in the annual rites (J. Watson 1982).
30. This pot of food was first offered to 'hungry ghosts' that were (according to villagers) thought to hover on the fringes of banquets. The 'leftover' food was then consumed by older, post-menopausal women who conceived of this act as a social service to the community (Rubie Watson, personal communication).
31. IFPRI (on-line), [clari-biz.industry.food:11915](http://clari-biz.industry.food:11915).
32. *Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics*, November 2003, p. FA5 (on-line).
33. In 1998, 50 per cent of pork consumed in Hong Kong was frozen or chilled; by 2002, this figure had risen to 59 per cent. Fewer and fewer people, including New Territories villagers, are eating 'fresh' (i.e., locally killed and butchered) pork; see source cited in note 31.
34. On the transformation of local foods into 'cultural heritage', see also Abbots (this volume) and Sobral (this volume).
35. These distribution rules are changing rapidly in the New Territories. Selina Chan notes that in the Pang lineage of Fan Ling, not far from San Tin, women (daughters) descended from the Pang apical ancestor are now given annual cash payments from his estate (see S. Chan 1997: 159–160).
36. See, for example, Anka Lee, 'Can Hong Kong Control Its Own Fate', *The Diplomat* ([thedi diplomat.com](http://thedi diplomat.com)), 16 April 2012.
37. Maurice Bloch has written about a similar process of change in the meaning of a ritual system of Madagascar (1986: 157–195).

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# 3

## From Fasting to Fast Food in Kumasi, Ghana

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Members of the Asante ethnic group in Ghana single out foodways as condensed reference features of the culture they value so fiercely. Outsiders or visitors are asked at once ‘Do you eat *fufu*?’, and positive answers usually merit a beaming smile. The challenging texture of this heavy dish<sup>1</sup> tests the sincerity and depth of their acculturation, while the same texture makes *fufu* so uniquely satisfying to Asante that the saying ‘if you haven’t eaten *fufu*, you haven’t eaten’ is often repeated next. One Kumasi acquaintance ventured to say that just eating *fufu* would teach a foreigner much about the culture. A real Asante loves *fufu* and fasts for funerals by abstaining from it.

Several authors have discussed the tenacity with which expatriate Asante and other Akan Ghanaians cling to *fufu* as a symbol of their continuing ethnic identification., The extensive network of West African groceries, restaurants and informal food preparers in the United States testifies to their devotion to ‘real Asante food’ (Renne 2007; Williams-Forsen 2013). The modifications and compromises necessary to maintain continuity in foodways despite long-term migration and international marriage are discussed in fascinating detail (Williams-Forsen 2010). Relatively little attention has been paid to the changing foodscape at home in Ghana under economic pressures and new aspects of globalization.

Kumasi was the historic centre of the Asante Empire and remains the seat of its ruler, the *Asantehene*. The surrounding Ashanti Region, though not currently including the maximum extent of that empire, remains one of the wealthiest regions in Ghana, with rich gold deposits and cocoa farms. Most Asante retain strong loyalty to the *Asantehene* and to the matrilineage system at the heart of their culture, to the point that other ethnic groups consider them arrogant. The Asante were the last in

present-day Ghana to resist British conquest in 1898, but not the last by far to accept European trade commodities and innovations. The Asante kingdom was founded in 1701, 200 years after European ships regularly traded on the coast, by Akans venturing deeper into the forest zone to control trade routes between the coast and older trade networks in the savannah zone.

European contact and colonial rule consolidated the importance of Kumasi, even while subordinating it more firmly within a global economic system. The British-built railroad and road systems meant to pre-empt this control but ironically cemented the pre-eminence of Kumasi as a hub of transport and commerce. The relatively central geographic location of Kumasi also preserved its intermediary role between ecological and agricultural zones, and its Central Market has a national and international reach, especially for farm produce. While political dominance shifted to the coastal capital of Accra, Kumasi remained the second largest city in Ghana.

Independence came to Ashanti Region in 1957 as part of a newly united Ghana. Successive changes of government, including periods of military rule, served to focus political power on Accra at the expense of Kumasi as well as the British. Although several heads of state were in fact Asante, the ethnic group became known as a chronic opposition stubbornly loyal to its own hierarchy of chiefs. This reputation diverted state resources and policy support to regions with stronger patronage ties.

Through the 1970s the growing impoverishment of working citizens in general posed a greater threat to cultural continuity. Falling real wages, rampant inflation and deteriorating terms of trade rendered Ghanaians in most regions increasingly frustrated at falling short of their own cultural norms. Few Asante could fulfil the expectations they otherwise endorsed for family support and personal dignity – neither men as uncles, fathers, husbands, sons and brothers nor women as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters. The shocks of structural adjustment in the mid-1980s only deepened this trend for the ordinary citizen. Coming on the heels of much destruction of capital in price control raids and other drastic commercial interventions from 1978 to 1983, household assets and incomes were cut again by massive public and private sector layoffs, rising medical and school fees, credit constraints and a currency devaluation that lowered the terms of trade.

Ghana's much vaunted economic recovery in the 1990s furthered polarization within and between communities, as neoliberal policies have done elsewhere. Investment and trade policies favoured international linkages, and this growth was sharply concentrated among elite

classes in the Accra-Tema area. Meanwhile the locally oriented agriculture and craft production in which Kumasi had some advantage were further starved of income and investment. Continuing globalization in the current century reinforces this neo-colonial agenda of external orientation, promoting emigration to Accra and overseas and posing new challenges to Asante assumptions of continuity and superiority. The resulting dramatic adjustments to both ceremonial foodways and everyday household provisioning significantly shift the boundaries between ideal, expected, permitted and stigmatized practices.

Jack Goody (1982: 78–79) contrasts the hierarchical Gonja and Asante with his early experience of the decentralized LoDagaa in the far north, informed by the ethnographic work of Fortes (1949). Yet his overall, dichotomous framework presents African foodways – including Gonja, Asante and LoDagaa – as less differentiated than those of Eurasian societies. He argues that the more centralized of African societies, such as Asante, like the decentralized ones, feast to express high status by preparing large quantities of food of the same types consumed by the average household. By contrast, Eurasian societies develop esoteric elite foodways that he labels cuisines. All important Asante royal ceremonies, such as the New Yam Festival and Akwasidae, featured the common local dishes of yam *fufu* and *eto* (mashed yam) and still do. Imported foods could not distinguish Asante people of high rank by the 1950s, because both rich and poor had already incorporated industrial commodities into their daily diets. Goody (1982: 176) notes the popularity of tinned tomatoes, sardines and evaporated milk, along with routine consumption of tea and bread, even in rural areas.<sup>2</sup> Shifts in food practices over the last 30 years in the Asante capital city, Kumasi, therefore demonstrate well how perceived traditions can be radically transformed without losing their traditional status. Asante make room within their concept of traditional culture for innovation and compromise, which they see as protecting its continuity and autonomy as long as Asante people remain in charge of the changes. In response to changes in the economy, labour demands, ritual practices and gender expectations – all traceable to globalization to some extent – Asante residents in Kumasi no longer expect to make *fufu* more than once a week or claim to fast at funerals. Yet they see no diminution in their fidelity to Asante culture or their Asante identity. Shrinking access of ordinary households to high-status traditional foods, particularly *fufu* as detailed in this chapter, suggests that their routine consumption may eventually signal exclusive elite status in the same way that wearing handwoven kente cloth to ordinary events already does.

## The symbolic and material status of *fufu*

The proverb 'if you haven't eaten *fufu* you haven't eaten' reflects the importance of *fufu* within the Asante self-image. Before about 1985, Kumasi's Asante households (and some of the other ethnic groups) normally cooked *fufu* every day at least once.<sup>3</sup> A chorus of thumping wooden pestles and mortars mashing boiled yam, cocoyam, cassava or plantain into a smooth ball of *fufu* once signalled the end of the working day in the city streets of Kumasi. While there are indeed some Asante who dislike *fufu* or avoid it for medical reasons, the majority still say that they will eat it whenever possible. Many claim that they would eat *fufu* three times a day if they could.

Bowls of *fufu* are prepared by pounding each serving to adjust its size and texture to the preference and age of an individual or group of equals who eat together. The preparer then covers the dome of *fufu* in each bowl with soup and carefully divides the available protein (meat, chicken or fish), setting an appropriate amount on top of each. Formerly, salt was scarce enough to add a variable amount to each dish according to the social status of the diners. The texture of *fufu* is unusually heavy, and it is digested slowly, creating an unmatched fullness that lasts a long time. Children fed *fufu* often walk around patting their swollen bellies and bragging about how full they are. In 1979, an elderly neighbour walking past my door turned up her nose at my generous plate of rice and stew, saying, 'Can you really sleep through the night with that? Don't you wake up in the middle of the night hungry?' Farm labourers and other manual workers frequently ate *fufu* for an early breakfast because it would keep them satisfied throughout the day without lunch (Clark 1994). Chop bars (roadside restaurants) served it continuously starting at seven in the morning, even in smaller towns and villages.

In a typical compound house in Kumasi, each adult woman cooks at her own hearth in a communal kitchen. Married women cook for their husbands, but a majority still live apart from them. Wives send or bring the finished dish to their husbands, while other women are bringing food to the brothers and uncles they live with. The evening meal is often shared among the male kin residing together, who eat together each of their wives' offerings as they arrive. Women also eat with female kin and neighbours, and children share another bowl. This not only evens out food access between families but also makes inferior meals a matter of shared knowledge, leading to embarrassment when a marital quarrel leads to careless cooking or meagre servings.<sup>4</sup> Both men and women

joked about wives expressing an unspoken grievance by 'accidentally' over salting the soup.

Asante were formerly very conservative in their food habits. Yam or cocoyam *fufu* is considered the most traditional; not coincidentally these plants were domesticated in West Africa. They incorporated plants originating on other continents into local foods, including *fufu*, but elders are still aware of the relative newness of plantain, which arrived from Asia via East Africa centuries ago. Cassava was brought from Brazil by the Portuguese as early as the 1600s, although some elderly Asante claimed that it was primarily planted as pig food before the catastrophic failure of staple crops in 1976. Used in various proportions according to taste, plantain and cassava cost less and produce a softer texture which some prefer.

I soon realized in 1978 that Asante recognized a limited number of soups as appropriate to complement *fufu*. This set repertoire of soups numbered only five: light soup, groundnut soup, palm soup, green-green soup and *werewere* soup (a seed of the size of sesame). All start with a basic broth of onions, pepper and tomato, and each had its variants depending on the types of fish or meat that went with it. Observers who noticed that I was trying different combinations of ingredients simply instructed me to go back and exchange them, explaining to the seller that I had not known any better. Very few friends would taste my unorthodox concoctions. This experience supports Goody's point that low esteem for innovation or uniqueness was characteristic of African cooking and worked against elite gourmet distinctions<sup>5</sup> (1982: 204).

Differences in the quality of cooking were noted and valued but reflected the quality of the relationships involved as much as superior skill. A soup's quality varied most directly with the amount and quality of the vegetables and meat or fish that went into the pot. This depended on such factors as the cook's income, the reliability of her husband or partner and her bargaining skill – not so much her skill as a cook. Quality in preparation came from grinding the vegetables very smooth and fine for the soup, pounding the *fufu* carefully and serving it promptly. These criteria required attention and motivation, but not creativity or long experience.<sup>6</sup>

The rapid mastery possible because of this limited repertoire sharply influenced the division of labour between generations. A daughter can generally learn these five soups by the age of 12 and become fully competent to replace her mother as the main cook. In large families each daughter replaces her next elder sister as she graduates from these responsibilities to focus on work or secondary school. Once a woman's

eldest daughter reaches this age, she can anticipate much more time available to expand her trading or other business (Clark 1989).

As befits the Asante homeland in dense primary forest, there was wide consensus that the most authentic soups used wild gathered items, such as palm nuts, mushrooms, greens, wild game and land and river snails. Palm nut soup with snails or bush meat, for example, was one of the most laborious to make, and its ingredients were expensive in the city. For an Asante villager with access to wild palm fruits and snails in the forest, it would cost only time. Until the mid-twentieth century, these wild foods were reliably abundant, although they were also traded over long distances within Asante (Goody 1982: 63).

### **Pounding *fufu* as sex, gender and marriage**

The cultural power of *fufu* is reinforced by its strong heterosexual connotations that arise from the central role of cooking in marriage. The exchange of cooking services for regular financial support is the core relationship that links husbands and wives, since by definition they are not kin. A premarital relationship creeps closer to a customary marriage when the man starts handing over money regularly for food. Historical marriage ceremonies for Asante culminate in the 'big meal' on the first night the bride joins the groom at his house (Goody 1982: 89). This supposedly demonstrates her cooking abilities, although prosperous extended families cooperate to send a lavish feast. Polygamous marriages avoid conflict by wives alternating daily or weekly in cooking for their husband and spending those nights with him. Each wife only receives the food allowance, called by men chop money or *akonhoma* (literally neck rope), on the days she will cook the evening meal and provide other domestic services.

A man proves his love and commitment by providing generously for the financial needs of his wife and children, just as a wife proves hers by preparing meals promptly and carefully. Married women should have a meal of *fufu* or similar starch and soup ready and waiting when their husbands get home after work. Cooking for one's children or kin is less demanding because 'they will eat anything', and the relationship is less contingent. Children must obey their mothers, while in marriage the wife should defer to her husband and meet his demands. The relatively high status women gain in their matrilineages as they mature does not carry over to marriage, the archetypal relationship between man and woman relating as such, rather than in specific kin relationships that cannot be broken (Clark 1999).

Cooking can even be used as a euphemism or open code for any steady sexual relationship. For example, one yam trader who travelled regularly was suspected of receiving freight discounts for sleeping with the truck driver. She retorted 'I'm not cooking for anyone! Have you seen that I am cooking for anyone?' The pestle or *fufu* pounding stick can appear as an emblem of womanhood. For example, at the funeral of a yam trader in 1979, the traders attending carried pounding sticks and pounded them forcefully on the pavement to keep time with the songs they sang outside the family house of the deceased. Conversely the pestle takes the male part when pounding *fufu* is used as a metaphor of heterosexual intercourse.

On the other hand, gender lines can bend with relative ease, as long as the asymmetry of kinship and seniority is still appropriate. Older women expect daughters and junior kin to cook for them and any young children present, allowing young boys to be enlisted temporarily to cook for their mothers if there are no sisters of the right age. Young men are routinely expected to pound *fufu* at home if they want to eat it, and chop bars also hire them to pound it in huge mortars. Young men living on their own cook for themselves or for their older brothers without shame (Clark 1989).

The very idea of a man cooking for a sister, wife or brother's wife seems absurd or even scandalous, almost a perversion. Men who cook or clean when they have wives expect general ridicule and outrage. One feminist university lecturer spoke of her husband drawing all the window blinds before cooking for the children when she stayed late at work, which she appreciated. He would never do this or admit ever doing so when his mother was visiting. Even struggling couples whose combined incomes could hardly cover their food needs found the very idea laughable. The wife of a poor man wished her husband could provide enough money to support a live-in relative or maid rather than help with the housework himself.

In poorer households, where a large proportion of the total income goes for food, the financial issues can be as fraught as the sexual or gender issues. In today's context of low incomes and a high cost of living, constant bickering over money mars many marriages. Children may need to nag for a while before school fees are paid. Medical expenses can also get caught in this kind of Mexican stand-off (Clark 1999). Spouses have separate incomes and discourage each other from asking about exact income levels. This mutual ignorance reinforces the dominant discourse about useless husbands and greedy wives (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1995; Cornwall 2001).

Asante women rarely live in the husband's family house, as is common with Ghana's patrilineal groups, and only with high-ranking chiefs did their co-wives reside together at the palace (Fortes 1949). This duo-local marital residence pattern generates jokes about potential deception; wives might send food with a sister or child and plead illness, while spending the night with someone else. Conversely, skimpy chop money or loss of appetite raises suspicions that the husband might be 'eating' elsewhere. The proprietor and barmaids of a chop bar were often suspected of prostitution on the side in the evenings, since fast food and fast women go together. Women phrased their infidelity fears as economic: 'He is spending the money on her that he should be spending on our children' (Clark 1989).

All these pressures concentrated on married women's cooking create real conflicts between saving the marriage and earning money for the children (Clark 1999). Quiet protests at inadequate financial support can be registered by reducing the amount of meat or other purchased ingredients served to the man. Complaints about tardiness of meals can be countered loudly by challenging him to provide enough money that she could afford to come home early from the market. Coming home before the market closes at six means a significant loss of income, yet cooking fufu after dark is not easy either.

The linkage of the evening meal with intimate relations raises the stakes for substituting for the wife's personal cooking with another's labour. A teenage maid old enough to cook well has a head start on developing intimate relations with the man she feeds. Akua, the maidservant, character of a popular comic series, represents a rival to Madame, who appears uncaring. A wife's own daughter or niece makes the ideal surrogate because of their presumed loyalty to the mother or aunt. Since Asante respect quite extensive bilateral incest prohibitions, even a woman's distant relations make fairly safe substitutes (Clark 1989).

Facing these trade-offs, working mothers gained important breathing room by shifting breakfast and lunch into the category of individual purchases rather than domestic service. Sexual connotations were associated primarily with the evening meal, making the commercialization of meals earlier in the day more culturally acceptable. These less symbolically charged meals are generally purchased in the less intimate context of commercial food vending (Clark 1989). Already in 1978, most Kumasi families bought breakfast and lunch individually from vendors near the home, school or workplace. All adult family members had to pay for their own purchased meals, while children's 'pocket money' could come

from either mother or father. Husbands usually did not count this as part of their ordinary chop money.

It was common for Kumasi wives to work outside the home in trading and other enterprises or jobs. Not having to be at home for lunch or breakfasts allowed them a longer working day and enabled some to take advantage of early or late trading opportunities. Surprisingly, I found that even women who worked out of their homes, such as seamstresses, were not expected to stop work and cook lunch for family members present there. It could even be more expensive to cook these small meals at home because just starting up the usual charcoal stove took a fair amount of charcoal.

Deviation from the marital ideal or norm was common for both spouses but might carry positive as well as negative consequences. The many wives who secretly subsidized their own meals to preserve the illusion of a successful marriage were judged as rather pathetic. A mother who openly provides completely for herself and her children is admired. A man who acts in a motherly fashion does not join in cooking but meets his children's financial needs fully and as soon as he hears of them, on top of any chop money. This male mother is likewise admired, earning him the honorific title *obaatan paa*, usually translated as nursing mother by Ghanaians (Clark 2001). This phrase was also routinely applied to God as perfectly loving Father, but such mortal men are said to be rare.

The tie to one's father can be a strong one, but it is built by actions during one's lifetime, not structurally unavoidable like loyalty to one's mother. Maternal uncles, aunties and grandmothers appear as the intimidating authority figures in personal narratives (Clark 2010). A beloved father earns his influence by contributing to the child's character and education and by physical intimacy. As one adult woman put it, 'I peed on his knee, so I have to take care of him'. Asante men and women normally expected care in old age from their own kin. One daughter may be delegated to care for her father physically, but she does it in her own family house and earns residence rights there for her lifetime only. Her children have rights only in their matrilineal family property and must eventually return to claim them. Brothers and sisters join their uncles in the afterlife and continue looking after their matrilineal descendants.

In a society that reveres its lineage ancestors, even the vow 'till death do us part' loses its edge. The significance of the continuing reciprocal exchange between marriage partners gained weight because the marital relationship was seen as inherently contingent. Market women constantly speculated about the possibility that even a currently satisfactory

husband could at any time be revealed as unfaithful or decide to marry an additional wife, halving his financial support. Apart from death or misbehaviour, chronic illness, unemployment or retirement could eventually remove his ability to maintain the exchange and hence the marriage. Nor would he be expected to remain at her side if she became incapable of performing her duties. A proverb saying 'you can get a new husband/wife, but not a new brother/sister' was commonly invoked by either spouse. One prosperous cloth trader even sounded sheepish about allowing her elderly husband to stay rent free in the house she had built, telling me 'I like to have him around to talk to'. When he eventually needed physical care, he was bundled off to his home village.

### **Asante funerals**

The iconic event of Asante culture is the funeral. Some of the proudest moments of any lineage are the funeral ceremonies carried out for lineage elders, where prominent members display their numbers, their material resources and their social networks. Funerals of close relatives, particularly the mother, are arguably the most important occasions in a person's life (De Witte 2001). The funeral is so powerfully recognized as a central cultural focus by both Asante and non-Asante that Kumasi political demonstrations often take the form of mock funerals. When Kumasi took its turn in the series of 'Kill Me Quick' protests of structural adjustment in 1991, the slogan was 'Bury Me Quick' and the marchers carried a coffin labelled with the name of the then head of state. In 2012, a coffin also appeared there in protests against reduced health insurance coverage, with the slogan 'Capitation is killing us'.

Before the 1980s, Asante commonly expressed pride in their strict fasting at funerals, as distinguishing them from neighbouring matrilineal Akan groups otherwise similar in culture. Fasting for days or weeks during major funerals showed that they were tougher than other Akans. They took funerals more seriously and therefore respected their dead ancestors more. Fasting symbolizes distress and solidarity with others' distress, marked by loss of appetite. For example, the ever-popular song 'Sweet Mother' repeats the line 'When I no chop [eat], she no chop'. Some Asante went so far as to denigrate northern ethnic groups like the Gonja and LoDagaa because these normally feasted at their own funerals.

The classic Asante funeral began with a night of wake-keeping that should be a rather sombre occasion, not festive. Both men and women might drink heavily of local gin on empty stomachs, and it was not

unheard of for fist fights to break out. The appropriate behaviour for a mourner was to wail uncontrollably. After the burial the next morning, seated ranks of relatives received visitors and their donations. Lineage members sat in front on a mat as the chief mourners. The wife or husband sat behind or to the side, in the rows of chairs under an awning, with the other in-laws (see also De Witte 2001).

In the late 1970s, when I began research in Kumasi, proper funeral practice allowed no visible food. A vendor might be selling candy (sweets) and gum, but unrelated guests not in deep mourning were expected to eat at home before or after attending. The funeral hosts provided beer and soft drinks to those who made donations, with schnapps to elders as they could afford it. Older women might pass around a bottle of local gin behind the house, but they did not eat. The virtues of fasting were available to all, regardless of wealth, and generally respected.

The relatives holding the funeral might eat in the privacy of an inside room, or at times when nothing ceremonial was going on, but even then they would eat only foods that were classified as snacks. These often went beyond candy and gum to include foods that served as lunch or breakfast at normal times. Eating plates of rice and beans, boiled yam or fried plantain and other light meals did not count as breaking their fast. This prompted sarcastic remarks from members of other ethnic groups to the effect that fasting was easy for Asantes because they interpreted the proverb 'If you haven't eaten *fufu*, you haven't eaten' so literally.<sup>7</sup> Since about the year 2000, elite and middle-income Asante in and around Kumasi allow or even provide substantial meals for funeral participants, overshadowing fasting by the competitive display of high-status food and drink consumed openly but still not including *fufu*. The category of snack foods thus became an important parameter of funeral observance as well as a mainstay of daily family provisioning.

### Street food, snack food and convenience food

During the 1980s, street food was part of the daily routine for most Kumasi residents, Akan or not. It bridged childcare gaps because children too young to cook on their own could be left at home with lunch money for themselves and younger siblings. Elementary school students bought food from vendors in the schoolyard until school lunch programmes began in the last decade. Secondary students could survive boarding school food shortages by bringing *gari*<sup>8</sup> from home. Young men were an important target customer for street food because they often did not yet have wives to cook for them.

Some snack foods were colonial commodities already incorporated into 'our tradition'. The Association of Kumasi Small-Scale Bakers attended funerals and palace festivals dressed in their uniforms of printed flour sacks. Christmas required boxes of biscuits or cookies to offer guests and send to friends. Most so-called provisions were tinned or packaged food that was already prepared and easy to store and cook. The term derives from rations given to employees under British rule, but these items were also promoted as 'civilized' food items at boarding schools and churches (c.f. Burke 1996). Consumption of many of them peaked in the 1930s; their use fell sharply during the Second World War with British rationing across the empire.

With independence, price control efforts focused on these 'provisions' as 'essential commodities' on lists that included imported and local manufactured soap, toothpaste and toilet paper, driving supplies further underground (Clark 1994). Most of these goods were imported or their raw materials and packaging were imported, so they became increasingly scarce again in the 1970s and 1980s with deepening foreign exchange shortages. Biscuits, for example, were rarely seen outside the Christmas season, which came just after the main cocoa harvest had been sold on the world market.

After trade liberalization in 1985, bread, beer, salad cream, Marmite, margarine and other familiar European items again became plentiful in the markets, although at inflated prices that not everyone could afford (Clark 1994). Independent Ghana also unfortunately inherited the hostile British attitude to street hawkers, considering them dirty and dangerous plus parasitic and useless. It continues, fairly consistently today in the colonial strategies of harassment, confiscation and punitive licensing conditions, to limit their numbers and activities despite open commitment to a free market (Clark 2012). Myriad small kiosks or sheds were built as convenience stores in the more distant Kumasi neighbourhoods, competing hard with the specialized retail area in the Central Market called the 'provisions line'.

The widespread availability of ready-to-eat food, whether local or imported, made it possible for work routines to cross city and provincial boundaries. Construction workers could work on remote suburban or exurban building sites because informal canteens sprung up quickly near new sites. Women traders could travel overnight to supply districts or across international boundaries, arranging for a local woman to cook for them when they were there or patronizing known chop bars along the highways (Clark 1999). Traders who needed to attend a market before 7.00 am waited until afterwards to buy a breakfast there of

drinkable porridge and bread, or an early brunch of *kenkey*<sup>9</sup> and fish. Market stallholders saw their lunches coming to them on the heads of passing hawkers, so they did not have to get up and leave their goods to patronize the cooked food areas on the market fringes.

When buying meals or snacks outside of the house, Asante were willing to enjoy a much wider variety of foods than they cooked at home. Market traders would buy snack foods from familiar vendors of various ethnicities, without even knowing their origin or sometimes their ingredients. *Konkonte* and its fermented cousin *banku* were popular menu items at chop bars and market stalls long before Asante would cook them at home. These formed starchy balls that could be covered with soup like *fufu*, and this experience gradually eroded Asante resistance to any evening meal except *fufu*. Ordinary families with working mothers had first replaced yams with cheaper plantain and cassava in their *fufu*. Next they replaced the *fufu* itself with *konkonte* or *banku*.

Locally processed convenience foods also began to be more popular: shredded greens, peanut butter, fermented corn dough for *banku* and ground or powdered tomatoes and pepper. The Maggi cube replaced local spices. Consumers admitted that the taste of these products suffered and narrowed the gap between home cooking and the dreaded chop bar, where these shortcuts were typical already. However, taking advantage of the efficiencies of scale of local bulk production saved unpaid time, created paid work and added value to the raw materials.

By the later 1980s, several economic trends brought both men and women to accept these kitchen compromises as inevitable and fair, if undesirable. Continuing neoliberal policies had increased income polarization, which multiplied the pressure for poor and lower middle class married women to work longer hours to generate more income. At the same time, growing inequalities were pushing poorer families out of many central neighbourhoods to distant suburbs, where the trip from home and back could take more than an hour in traffic. Mothers arrived home too late and too tired to consider starting a soup. Some women tried making their soup the night before or early in the morning, so children could cook the accompanying starch after school. In the 1990s, families began to relegate the whole category of dishes offering a smooth starchy lump served with a soup to Sundays, when most people did not work. They began to switch on weeknights to evening meals that did not need as much cooking, like rice or *kenkey*.

In fact, those who still wanted a daily dose of *fufu* now reported that they bought it from a vendor in the market or street, often as lunch or even a late breakfast. The distinction between home and market meals

had reversed when a woman trader said she bought *fufu* every day in the market and made rice and stew or other light meals when she got home. She was too tired to make *fufu* by the time she got home, and it was too late to eat it. I was surprised to hear one young man, a taxi driver, say that he not only liked *fufu* but still ate it three or four nights a week. This *fufu* fanatic was also the only man I ever heard willing to admit that he sometimes made it himself, 'when his wife got home tired and refused to do it'. This rare 'gender bending' indicated how far *fufu* has fallen, from a basic marital expectation to an unreasonable request.

Despite the radical reorganization of Kumasi eating habits, gender remains a primary structural factor in the meanings of food. The representation of cooking in magazine articles, brand names and advertising is still strongly gendered, although it expresses gender in a changing way in response to broader economic changes and conflicts. The 'Devoted Mother Bakery' (*obaatan paa*), for example, exhorts a mother to express that devotion through her careful choice of bakery rather than through home-made bread or cookies. White men get stereotyped as rich and lecherous in the cartoon on a sugar branded 'Sugar Daddy'. A billboard advertisement for powdered instant *fufu* highlights class perspectives through gender. The model for the instant *fufu* user is plumper, relaxed and lighter skinned and dresses in a more feminine manner. The other woman who pounds her *fufu* is darker, thinner, scowling, sweaty and dirty, wearing an unflattering, old-fashioned black suit. Even globally sourced products are relabelled for the Ghanaian market with names that refer to Akan gender ideals. The sardines labelled *obaa paa* (good woman) are originally from Peru but processed for a French company.

Some local establishments do try to attract customers with the glamour of foreign names such as 'Burger Queen'. The elaborate menus presented at middle-level, popular restaurants, often owned by men, also invoke internationalist prestige. These categorize dishes roughly by national cuisine, and a respectable restaurant menu lists several in each category, decorated with pictures of dishes not always listed on the menu. Common categories include the following: local, continental, Chinese, pasta, pizza and grill. There may be a curious twist to their content, for example, classifying fried rice as continental and *jollof*<sup>10</sup> rice from Senegal as local. One billboard with a menu on it showed pizza and pasta as categories of their own, not continental or Italian. Steaks, where offered, count as continental and grilled fish count as local. Grill turns out to be a code word for Lebanese food, featuring *kebab* and *kafta*.<sup>11</sup>

The tea and bread stand, usually offering a fried egg sandwich, has a global origin but was thoroughly localized. Men often ran the original

type of tea stall that is a long-standing tradition here, with long wooden benches and a single counter. They were located in the open air at taxi and truck stops to serve drivers and commuters in the early morning or late at night. Some tea stalls have modern decorations, while others have expanded by serving meals and even sprouted into sizable bars or street restaurants.

These male venues introduced many catering innovations. For example, the first street stands to serve salad were those at taxi stations. Young men also started the fast food phenomenon called 'check-check' in Accra (Overa 2007). These orange-themed street stalls contradicted the female-oriented chop-bar atmosphere with their bright lighting, plastic chairs and tables and uniformed attendants. A few 'check-check' establishments linger on in Kumasi now, but men have branched out into a wider range of street foods and bar/restaurants as well.

One modest restaurant near the market imitated the look of a US fast food chain, with orange walls and plastic chairs around dinette tables. It offered a US-style breakfast with fried eggs, pancakes and sausage and was doing well, with three locations in Kumasi. Other options in the same vicinity included a more indigenous breakfast of Ga *kenkey* and hard fried fish but not the Asante 'authentic' breakfast of *apim ampesie ne kontommere* (boiled small plantains and cocoyam leaf stew). Compared to freshly made *ampesie*, the pre-cooked *kenkey* and pre-fried fish are a local fast food.

## Rice

One of the most dramatic recent changes has been the rise in the use of white rice and some foods of Chinese origin. Rice (usually cooked with beans) had originally been popular as a snack food sold by vendors (Williams-Forsen 2010). By 1978, white rice with chicken had become the traditional Christmas dish, cooked in large pots to share with friends and family by those who could afford it. It did not have the association with breakfast that bread and *kenkey* did, and it was reported to have been, before the 1960s, an elegant dish that not every woman knew how to make (Clark 2010). As the price of chickens gradually fell after then, it became more affordable. By the end of the twentieth century, rice had become an acceptable dinner dish with stew or with fried fish or chicken and tomato gravy.

Rice also became popular in informal restaurants because it is cheap and requires little labour input or time. It can be prepared ahead of time and kept warm in electric rice cookers most of the day. The chop bar

at the Kumasi football stadium, another male gathering point, was the first-to-serve fried rice by 1990, when there was still only one Chinese restaurant in town. Now there are several, but most of the other more formal restaurants serve fried rice as well, usually with chicken or fish. This is more likely to be actually available than the fried potatoes or yams that may be listed as an option. Many smaller restaurants in Kumasi, despite displaying extensive menus, said upon enquiry that in fact they only had rice (steamed, fried and *jolof*) that evening.

Chinese dishes at small local restaurants, whose target clientele is predominantly African, are usually limited to those called sauce: beef sauce or chicken sauce, sometimes shrimp or pork sauce. These are soupy stews with sliced cabbage, green peppers and carrots swimming in gluey corn-starch gravy, served with steamed rice. The growing Chinese expatriate community in Kumasi keeps to itself, patronizing and monopolizing certain restaurants, hotels and grocery shops where little English is spoken. Some of these cater to working-class Chinese such as mine workers, while others cater to Chinese business executives.

A Chinese snack, the spring roll, has been incorporated into the repertoire of street hawkers, who roam through congested Kumasi intersections with regulation glass-windowed boxes on their heads that show doughnuts, cakes, sliced fruit and meat pies. Nowadays one can always find spring rolls along the major roads in Kumasi, although the crisp cylinders may unpredictably have fillings of black-eyed peas or cabbage and a touch of hamburger (evoking the older meat pie) in place of spring vegetables. Spring rolls are now joining meat pies and other snack foods among the standard items relatives expect to buy for Akan funerals in Kumasi.<sup>12</sup>

Instead, tighter constraints on labour and money have moved what was once normal into the category of Sunday or holiday treat for all but the super-rich or the super-dedicated.

## Conclusion

As explained above, Asante once proudly fasted for the entire funeral period, more strictly and longer if closely related to the deceased. Funeral food provided by its organizers started with covert snacks given to those who had travelled from their homes in Accra or overseas and needed to eat before they started back. At one funeral, I saw travellers who brought their own fried chicken in the car trunk and ate it near the car, in a kind of funereal tailgate party. By 2006, funeral sponsors began to serve food inconspicuously, from a relative's house one or two

blocks away. An older child would be sent to lead a designated visitor to a plate carefully calibrated to the funeral donation made. This followed the older pattern of rationing drink – Fanta, beer or gin – according to the size of donations.

Funeral contributions were always welcome in cash, but donations in kind now may include food as well as soft and hard drinks. One large Kumasi traders' association enumerated its standard funeral benefit in terms of cases of soft drinks and beer, schnapps, and dozens of meat pies and spring rolls, which most members agreed was appropriate. Only a few elderly women members protested that their family funerals were held back in the home village, where people still did not eat, so they wanted the money instead. This indicates that the shift away from fasting was still somewhat limited to the larger towns or cities, like Kumasi.

Funeral directors or sponsors from large extended families in Kumasi now expect that hiring caterers will be one of the major expenses of a funeral. They openly plan ahead to order enough food, specifying the number of plates of rice and stew or chicken and chips they think they will need. The significance of these plates of rice or chips has changed because the same foods are now commonly served at home as a main evening meal. They can no longer be dismissed as snacks, alongside fruit and doughnuts, yet all the items frequently ordered might once technically have been called snacks. *Fufu* remains in a category all its own and is never served at funerals, even in Kumasi (De Witte 2001).

The continued special status of *fufu* suggests that the dramatic shift away from daily *fufu* did not reflect a massive shift in Asante food preferences. It is still a valued cultural symbol of 'real Asante food', and it is still conspicuously absent at funerals. Tighter constraints on labour and money have moved what was once normal into the category of Sunday or holiday treat for all but the super-rich or the super-dedicated. The foods formerly eaten covertly or dismissed as snacks, including rice, meat pies and spring rolls, are now considered normal meals and eaten openly there. Since eating *fufu* is now restricted to special occasions, its appearance at a funeral today would even more strongly displace the appropriate funereal sadness and anger with an air of real celebration.

Like traditional dress, which the average Kumasi residents cannot afford to wear daily, traditional food (*fufu*) has moved beyond their routine reach. They no longer can afford the 'real food' that would be fully satisfying physically and culturally on a daily basis. In a symbolic sense, settling for former snack foods as the usual evening meal means they are fasting most of the time. It then makes sense that fasting at funerals

loses its former emphasis. Asante can no longer boast about their fasting when it has become a daily routine, but at least they still avoid *fufu* at funerals.

## Notes

1. Asante make *fufu* by boiling starchy staples (yam, cocoyam, cassava and/or plantain) and then pounding them in a mortar and pestle, typically a mortar two feet in diameter and a pestle five-feet long. The resulting mound, more or less elastic according to taste, is served in a large bowl swimming in peppery soup. Several West and Central African cultures also call their staple dish *foufou* or *foutou* but make it with yam or cassava flour (Osseo-Asare 2005: 28). This makes a lighter, softer product that is digested more quickly, one which Kumasi residents would call *konkonte*.
2. Although these commodities are considered necessities in the rural areas, they remained cheaper and more easily available in larger cities. Kumasi residents visiting rural relatives in 1979 would often bring tinned food as gifts, and also buy fresh bread on sale in lorry parks as they departed.
3. The thick maize porridge called *ugali* plays a rather similar role as the one 'real food' in Tanzania (Ohna, Kaarhus and Kinabo 2012).
4. Holtzman (2002) discusses how a wife's control over food preparation and distribution can have political ramifications for her husband when his influence requires generous hospitality, as it does for the Samburu and Nuer.
5. The contrary example of Cotonou, Benin demonstrates a connection between the premium on variety and innovation there and a much longer and more diversified learning curve (Elwert-Kretschmer 2001).
6. A reliance on cooked food or snacks prepared for sale as breakfast and lunch was also taken for granted in many other West African communities, as noted for the Gonja by E. Goody (cited in Goody 1982: 188) and for Hausa communities in Nigeria by Schildkrout (2002).
7. Holtzman (2013) discusses the equally important classification for Samburu of tea as food or drink, affecting whether the newest age grade can consume it at home.
8. *Gari* is a toasted cassava meal which can be reconstituted without further cooking by adding water or tinned evaporated milk.
9. *Kenkey* is made from fermented corn dough steamed in leaf-wrapped balls by stacking them in a large covered pot over boiling water. This elaborate process is rarely undertaken for home consumption but generally in commercial quantities by women specialists. Asante recognize two forms of *kenkey* that they call Fante and Ga *kenkey*. Ga women wrap a moist ball of dough in corn husks, which they generally sell immediately after steaming while it is hot. Fante women are known for a firmer, drier, sourer *kenkey*, which they trade over great distances that keeps for many days (Asiedu-Addo 2011). Thick, flat rounds of dough are firmly wrapped in plantain leaves before steaming and then thoroughly smoked, intensifying their strong flavour. Fante women are also known for their skill in bread baking.
10. The flavourful recipe for *jolof* rice, like its name, is derived from the *Wolof* people, who are rice growers in coastal Senegal.

11. These particular Lebanese dishes are indeed grilled on skewers. A *kebab* skewers meat cut into small chunks, while *kofta* uses ground meat pressed around the skewer in a long patty.
12. Staples (this volume) notes the growing consumption of rice, Chinese foods and chicken in contemporary South India.

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# 4

## Civilizing Tastes: From Caste to Class in South Indian Foodways

*James Staples*

### Introduction

Anthropologists have long recognized that rules and practices concerning food and caste in India are closely intertwined. The ritually highest ranking Hindu castes are characterized as protecting their purity by accepting cooked (or *kacca*) food from no one of lower caste status and those at the bottom as accepting food from anyone (see, e.g., Mayer 1960; Marriott 1968; Dumont 1970; Bétéille 1996: 56–60; Deliége 1999). Caste identity is also reflected in what people eat: castes within the Brahmin and Vaisya *varnas* are usually vegetarian; castes from the other two *varnas* might eat meat; and Dalits, Muslims and Christians – located outside the classic four *varna* model altogether – might also eat beef (Deliége 1999: 38; Staples 2008). Variations in preparation and tastes are also frequently attributed to caste as well as to strong regional affiliations. For example, some Brahmins, older women in particular, avoid garlic, onions and other ‘heating’ ingredients deemed inappropriate for their bodily substance (Lamb 2000: 193; Daniel 1987), while others claim to adopt a more complex or refined meal structure than their regional peers from other castes.

The problem with interpreting food and commensality in relation to caste is not that it is misguided per se. Beyond the mostly low-caste people I worked with in South India – outcaste by leprosy as well as in a more conventional sense – caste remains important in shaping food consumption, especially in northern India and in Nepal, where Hindu cosmologies appear to be less tempered by the influence of other communities than elsewhere in the region. As Liechty notes, however, even in Nepal, until 2006 a Hindu state, there has been a shift from an earlier caste-based logic of social interaction to one based more on class,

certainly in the public sphere (2005: 21). But even earlier, as Appadurai pointed out more than 30 years ago in respect of India, food avoidances could also signal 'sect affiliation, life-cycle stages, gender distinctions, and aspirations toward higher status' (1981: 495); all distinctions that went beyond caste.

My point, then, is that our focus on caste as the defining social institution of India has obscured a range of social relationships defined by other cross-cutting hierarchies – including those of class, gender and age – that also, and increasingly, reflect and shape Indian foodways. In addition, as Goody's seminal work in this area teaches us, we need to interpret food and commensality in relation to historical change (Goody 1982: 36); local environmental factors (Goody 1982: 95); the wider contexts of food distribution, preparation and consumption (Goody 1982: 43); and, more widely still, the world economy (Goody 1982: 37). It is in the gaps that emerge between the multiplicity of overlapping but sometimes contradictory hierarchies which develop through these contexts that the meanings of food and relationships centred around it might also be manipulated and renegotiated in attempts to subvert what are otherwise seen – from a top-down or overly structuralist perspective – as hard-and-fast commensal rules.

This chapter is concerned with how notions of 'class' in particular – a category I begin to untangle in the next section – affect what people in South India eat, with whom and why, especially in the wake of the economic liberalization that began in the 1990s and, with it, the emergence of new foods and tastes ripe for symbolic appropriation. I argue that the emergence of a so-called new middle class has implications for the dietary patterns not only of those identified within that category but also for society more generally.<sup>1</sup> I provide an overview of what is eaten in the area where I conduct most of my fieldwork – coastal Andhra Pradesh – discussing some of the variations within that cuisine and how they are used as markers of distinction.

## Defining class

Class has received greater attention in South Asian ethnography in recent years, with a particular focus on what is often termed the 'new middle class' (Säävälä 2003) or the 'consuming class' (Corbridge and Harriss 2000: 123–124; cited in Fuller and Narasimhan 2007: 125): a social classification that has emerged in tandem with economic liberal reforms since the early 1990s. Although the differences between caste and class are frequently blurred – a large number of new middle class

IT professionals in Chennai, for example, are also Brahmins (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007) – class is generally more fluid as a social categorization, performed as much as ascribed. Used as an index of self-identity, class might also allow ritually lower castes to claim elevated status on the basis of their economic power.<sup>2</sup>

While there has long been a middle class in India, then, it has been changed and expanded in the last 20 years by increased transnational traffic in people, ideas and images. This has ‘facilitated the emergence of an increasingly wealthy upper-middle and middle-class populace who not only had access to these previously out-of-reach narratives, but for the first time, could also afford them’ (Reddy 2005: 217). Its newer members might broadly be defined by their educational attainments and their professional and technical skills (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007: 122; see also Goody 1982: 97, 175, 183 *et passim*), as well as by their capacities to use and embody them in socially acceptable ways (McGuire 2011). They are often characterized in contradistinction to an older, more established middle class as vulnerable and anxious – an existential state befitting the employment instabilities of a market-driven economy, rather than the secure public sector posts of the past (Mankekar 1999: 97; Säävälä 2003).<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary analyses also tend to explore class in India as performative – something learned, shaped and expressed through embodied action – rather than determined, as a more strictly Marxist interpretation might have it, only by economic circumstances. It is in this context that there has been a focus on the relationship between class, taste and consumption. Class, as Liechty points out, ‘is not prior to or outside of discourse and performance but an emergent cultural project wherein people attempt to speak and act themselves...into cultural “reality” or “coherence”’ (Liechty 2005: 3; see also Dickey 2011; Säävälä 2003; Ortner 2003: 13–14). Although much of this work centres on public consumption in general, there has also been attention given to contemporary restaurant culture and public dining (Conlon 1995; Nandy 2004; Liechty 2005; Siegel 2010), as well as to changes in domestic cuisine and commensality (Caplan 2008; Donner 2008). Nearly all these accounts of India’s contemporary middle class, however, envisage such social groupings as predominantly urban and pay little heed to the role played by those at the peripheries of such groupings, such as the many aspirants to middle-class lifestyles I encountered in provincial towns and villages in coastal Andhra Pradesh or who migrated to the cities from the countryside to find work and fulfil other social expectations.

The bulk of my own research has been in the rather atypical context of Bethany, a self-run multi-caste leprosy colony of around 350 families, mostly converts from Hinduism – and in a few cases Islam – to Christianity: a village on the borders of a town with a population of around 60,000 people (see Staples 2007). Significantly, while Bethany dwellers remain poor – many families are still reliant on begging – interventions from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have meant that a higher proportion of the younger generation had been educated, at least until the end of high school, than their local peers from comparable socio-economic backgrounds (see Staples 2012). Increasing numbers of this generation also undertake either vocational training or college degrees post their schooling, and this – as will become clear – has had important implications for how they related to food. Assuming that the diets and food-sharing habits of such a community were representative of Andhra would be misleading, but during my time in Bethany (around three-and-half years across more than ten visits since 1984) I also dined extensively with contacts in surrounding villages and the local town, as well as accompanying many of my informants on visits to their natal places, where I stayed and ate with their mostly Hindu (and occasionally Muslim) families, the majority of which were still engaged in peasant farming. During a separate period of 16 months' fieldwork in the state capital of Hyderabad, 200 miles west of the village, I also ate in numerous Hindu and Muslim homes across social strata, in so doing gaining a much wider picture of Andhra cuisines (and the particular Mughal-inspired cuisine for which Hyderabad is famed), than had I dined exclusively within Bethany. What my particular work in Bethany also draws to attention, however, is the potential for manipulation of meanings attributed to food in different contexts, enabling us to observe how food can change status in a way that an understanding rooted in birth-ascribed caste elides. It also offers evidence of how the status-enhancing culinary practices of urban elites, while beyond the scope of most of my informants, nevertheless sat in a complex relationship to their own foodways.

### **Eating the Andhra way**

Since I started visiting South India in the mid-1980s, the diet of those among whom I worked – both everyday and festival – has centred around rice: two or occasionally three main meals comprising a mountain of boiled white rice and accompaniments. The latter depend on the occasion, the seasonal accessibility of ingredients and the economic

status of the diner, but, in general, are most often either a seasonal vegetable *pulusu* (a wet curry rather than a dry fry), a lentil-based curry (*pappu* or *dhal*) and/or a thin tamarind *rasam*, followed by chutney and, with the last of the rice eaten, curd or buttermilk. When money was scarce, the *dhal* first got more watery and later might be replaced initially by chutney, a smaller quantity of which could flavour more rice than a similar quantity of curry, and in *extremis*, just chilli powder mixed through the rice with water. In more affluent households and in times of relative plenty, supplements might include a fried vegetable accompaniment and/or a poppadom, or sometimes a banana to round off the meal. The *dhal* might also be enhanced by the addition of ghee, and households might indulge in a better quality of rice.

At festival times and life-cycle rituals, the basic structure of the meal remained consistent, although various forms of fried rice or *pulao* – infused with coconut, cardamom, cinnamon and other spices – replaced at least a portion of the usual boiled white rice, and *puris* or other wheat-based items might also be added. Among non-vegetarian groups, like the one among which I worked, meat – usually chicken – was also seen as essential, and the curd, otherwise served plain, would be transformed into *perugu charu* with sliced red onions and green chillies. The spicing also became more complex: to the most basic mix of chilli powder, turmeric and salt, such additions as cinnamon, cloves, ginger and garlic would also be mixed and added as *masalas*. Freshly prepared *gonkora patchidi* – a chutney made with the green leaf so associated with the region that it was known as *Andhra mata* (Andhra's mother) – would also be served as an accompaniment.

In the domestic arena, meat or fish also makes an appearance in Bethany at least on Sundays, and eggs – either hard-boiled and served alongside another curry or cooked as part of a curry dish – might also be served once or twice during the week. In local farming communities, however, where families had less disposable income, I was told that meat was less common – saved mainly for festival days and for important guests, with sometimes whole months passing without any being available. In terms of the meat eaten, although beef – either cow or buffalo meat – is still eaten in well over half of all village households in Bethany<sup>4</sup> and more widely still in the low-caste Christian hamlets that link the colony to the local town, in recent years it has been overtaken, for reasons of price and availability, by farmed broiler chicken. In addition, goat – which was popular when I first visited the village in the mid-1980s – has become increasingly rare: a scarcity of common grazing land combined with high rearing costs had rendered the meat too costly.

These days meat is mostly purchased from stalls in the local market and only on special occasions from neighbours who have reared their own, more expensive but tastier, livestock. Vegetables come either from entrepreneurs within the community who stock up their trolleys from the market and sell it on from the centre of the village or direct from the market itself.

As most of those I worked with had below poverty line (BPL) government ration cards – allowing them access to state-subsidized rations of key staple goods – limited stocks of rice, sugar, lentils and cooking oil were purchased from a ‘ration shop’ within the village, supplemented by purchases from open-fronted shops in the local bazaar, where people also buy spices, tea and other provisions.<sup>5</sup> Up until a couple of years ago, a number of families also reared buffalo for milk production, although these days most milk is purchased from outside dairies, sometimes already pasteurized in sealed plastic bags, and curd is often sold ready-made.

Most cooking, however, is still from scratch: sealed-packets of commercially produced spices are a relatively recent innovation, and there are packet mixes for *gulab jamun* and pre-mixed *sambar* powder on the shelves in local shops, but these remain relatively uncommon. Local grocers still weigh out the majority of their products from large gunnysacks into the steel and aluminium storage containers consumers take with them to market, although tea, instant coffee and cooking oil are commercially packaged and rice is now mechanically dehusked before sale. Durable foodstuffs such as chutneys, while also commercially available in jars, are usually either made at home or purchased from neighbours who prepare them from their own fruit and vegetables and sell them on. The only other ready-made packaged foods regularly purchased are items such as sweet white bread and biscuits – eaten with tea and coffee, or by those who are unwell – and boiled sweets and toffees. Even these tended to be bought mainly for special occasions such as prayer meetings and children’s birthday celebrations, when they are given out from large basins.

Although the basic rice-with-accompaniments meal structure was consistent throughout the community and was common among local families I ate with elsewhere, some informants spoke of alternative arrangements in their natal places that reflected caste and other distinctions. My research assistant Das, for example, a Brahmin originally from Tamil Nadu, stressed that meals in his natal home – even when they were short of money – were more complex than those his wife in the colony now served him, something confirmed when I ate with his

relatives in Madras on several occasions. Whereas meat was a mark of prosperity in the village, for vegetarian castes greater affluence was signalled through the number of courses as well as the complexity and quality of ingredients of the individual dishes. The order in which food is eaten also varies across India's regions: where I worked in coastal Andhra, if a meat or fish dish is served it is eaten early in the meal, before the *dhal*, *rasam* and other accompaniments; in Calcutta – as I learned from the horrified looks on my hosts' faces when I tucked into the fish and egg stew they had prepared for me before the vegetable and lentil-based dishes – it should be eaten last.<sup>6</sup>

It was, however, *tiffin* – a general term adopted to cover breakfast and other non-rice-based snacks – which allowed for most of the variation within the daily diets of those among whom I worked. *Dosas* and *idlis* – both made with fermented black gram and rice, one fried and the other steamed – were the most popular and, because they were labour intensive to prepare, were often bought in from village *tiffin* or tea shops along with the peanut or coconut chutney and special chilli powder with which they were usually served, or were prepared communally by neighbours, using shared grinding stones. Sweetmeats such as Mysore pak, kaja and peanut clusters – non-milk-based and cooked in ghee, so with a longer shelf life than those available fresh in the local bazaar – were also available in the teashops along with salt biscuits and branded boiled sweets and toffees (which were mostly the preserve of children), betel nut and cigarettes.

Men, in particular, often ate their *dosas* and *idlis* in the teashops along with their morning tea, a glance at the newspaper and a chat with their friends and neighbours. They would then take additional supplies back home for the rest of the family. Other breakfasts prepared at home, not common in teashops or restaurants, included *ragi java* (a thin brown porridge made from red or finger millet) and *upma* (a thicker porridge made from semolina and flavoured with curry leaves, peppercorns, mustard seeds and green chillies).

In the evenings, there were additional stalls in the centre of the village (and outside, lining the roads to the nearby town) touting fried savouries, including chilli *bujjis* (green chillies fried in a gram flour batter and served with finely chopped red onion and squirts of lime juice), *pakodis* (chopped onion and, sometimes, other vegetables fried with curry leaves in a crisp batter) and *potato bonda*, eaten in the street by men and sometimes taken home in newspaper parcels to their families. These and non-vegetarian deep-fried snacks, such as spiced chicken and fish, were also noted as favourites to accompany liquor.

Few of the older generation, either in Bethany or in the local town, ate main meals out unless they had to, and women in particular seldom ate rice-based meals in restaurants. When they worked as labourers in the fields they tended, like the men, to take steel boxes of either *pulihora* (fried rice preserved with lemon or tamarind) or curd rice and pickle; the same kind of food was prepared for long train journeys. Women did, though, partake of tea, sweets and fried snacks if they were brought back for them, both from within the village and from the bazaar. My own cook, for example, would often ask me to bring her a portion of *badam palu* (almond milk), *chivda* (Bombay mix) or fresh milk sweets if I was going to the bazaar to sustain her during one of her twice weekly fasts (during which she forwent a full rice-based meal but, as was quite common, ate other foods). They also took drinks, including the iced fruit juices and sherbets that were available in the bazaar and, occasionally, bottled soft drinks, which recently had become available in smaller, and therefore more affordable, bottles. Such foods, while adding variety to the diet, were nevertheless seen as peripheral to the main food events of rice, curries and curd, and when people asked if you had eaten they always meant rice.

Given the culinary conservatism the above implies, it is difficult to envisage the fluidity in dining arrangements required to use food as a signal of class distinction. As Goody (1982: 36) reminds us, however, diet has always evolved in relation to a nexus of circumstances, and although rice has been cultivated in India since at least the third century AD (Achaya 1994: 44–45), even 40 years ago, as many older informants attested, it was not available in the quantities it is today, even though for most it remained the ideal. For example, my 46-year-old friend Kumari – who originally came from the more arid Andhra region of Rayalseema – recalls that the midday meal in the rural household she grew up in was always *sangati* – a solid dish combining *ragi* (finger millet) or, in some areas, *jonnalu*<sup>7</sup> (sorghum) with, at that time, hand-pounded rice. Many of her elders back in her natal village still eat the dish in preference to boiled rice, but those of her generation and younger seldom choose it these days, and I was never offered it. Her husband Jawaharlal, who came from a farming village near Bethany in coastal Andhra, also ate some *sangati* as a child, although rice – again, hand pounded rather than mechanically processed in a mill, as it is nowadays – was more readily available than in other areas. So too were the small fish that could be had in abundance from the paddy fields. Alongside chutney and green chillies they made up the bulk of his diet. Pesticides and contemporary

farming methods, he lamented, had put a stop to that particular source of protein.

Both Jawaharlal and Kumari, along with the bulk of those with whom I worked, were growing up at the onset of the so-called green revolution (see, e.g., Frankel 1971) in the mid-to-late 1960s, kick-started in Andhra by – as many informants made reference to – the completion of the Nagarjuna Sagar dam in 1967, a major hydroelectric and irrigation project. It was the improved irrigation brought by the dam, coinciding with a more widespread investment in tools, fertilizers and seeds, that led to a vast increase in rice production<sup>8</sup> and, with it, mills that industrialized the dehushing process.

More recent changes in dining appear less radical in that the basic structure of a meal eaten in the home has remained fairly consistent, across classes as well as castes, over the 28 years I have been visiting the region. There have, however, been important variations at the peripheries – in terms of the food eaten outside the context of household meals – as well as changes in attitudes towards food and presentation. The main shifts, it became apparent during my fieldwork in the summer of 2011, were generational, and were concerned with what most people still referred to generically as *tiffins*. *Idli* and *dosa* or the deep-fried South Indian snacks I described above remained popular across the board. Those under the age of 30, however, had been sensitized to other culinary opportunities through media, education, a greater range of choices and wider social contacts than had been available to their parents' generation, and so they were also more adventurous in their tastes. Chinese-inspired dishes – such as fried noodles and cauliflower or chicken Manchurian, all served with bottled soy and sweet chilli sauces – were especially popular, as were local versions of pizzas and (vegetarian) burgers. Fifteen years ago, none of these items were locally available: the most exotic items on offer then were the processed cheese and white bread sandwiches sometimes available at the railway station (and marketed predominantly at those passing through).

With the opening of a new restaurant in the mid-1990s, not only did these dishes become readily accessible in the local town, but a relatively respectable space was provided in which both young men and women could socialize beyond the confines of their households.<sup>9</sup> Unlike the utilitarian and mostly vegetarian 'meals hotels' in the centre of town or clustered around the bus station – where standard set-meals were quickly served and eaten in near silence by the diners – customers at the new, non-vegetarian restaurant could take their time over snacks or meals and bottled cold drinks, shielded from the main thoroughfare

in an enclosed courtyard or kept cool in the air-conditioned 'special room'. Like the Delhi coffee chains described by McGuire (2011: 120), this was a place for conspicuous consumption. In addition to South Indian 'meals', north-Indian dishes incorporating unusual ingredients like mushrooms, peas and *paneer* (cheese) were also on the menu, as were Chinese dishes and a limited range of Western specialties, such as sandwiches and 'finger chips', available with tomato ketchup. As well as a haven for a visiting anthropologist, the new restaurant also proved popular among local business people with clients to entertain and, in particular, with the student population.

Most of the young people I knew at the time could not afford to go to the restaurant very often, if at all, and when they did it was usually to share a small bottle of *Pepsi* with two or three friends from college. When takeaway stalls and other cheaper outlets selling similar types of food proliferated in the years ahead, however, they were already knowledgeable about what was being offered. 'Our parents won't eat this kind of food because they don't know about it', as one 19-year-old girl explained to me when I asked her about her diet.

We'll eat things like pizza when we're out with college friends, or chicken noodles and Manchurian, or maybe mixed fried rice. There are so many places in town where you can get that kind of food now – maybe 50 takeaway joints. It's just what we do on special occasions and celebrations, like a friend's birthday, for example.

Others told very similar stories, adding that they had taken to eating such food along with their fellow students when they lived in college hostels. Takeaway outlets also enabled girls from more conservative families – those who would not have allowed them to go alone with their peers to a restaurant – to partake of such food.

Although those in their mid-30s and above have been more reticent about trying the new dishes on offer, they have nevertheless been affected by the increase in numbers of relatively cheap takeaway stalls and 'curry points', from which it is also possible to purchase a plastic bag of *sambar* or other curry – enough to stretch around a family when combined with pickles – for around Rs. 10. In just the last two years, I discovered, it has become common for many households to buy in takeaway portions to supplement their home-made cuisine once or twice a week. This has simultaneously enhanced choice within households – if members don't like what's on offer they can have something brought in – and, in a small way, so far, freed up time for women

that was otherwise spent cooking. Among some women, particularly those under 50, there had also been a slight drift away from simply replicating or embellishing the dishes their female kin had taught them, to experimenting with recipes in books, magazines and on the television and, as I shall elaborate on more in the next section, to presenting their food, at least to outside guests, in what they considered more modern and socially prestigious ways.

Some of the changes I have described here have undoubtedly been brought on by the increased flow of goods and ideas that liberalization has permitted. Such developments as an improved electricity supply and the availability of privately owned generators, which have allowed caterers to invest in freezers and thus offer a wider range of food choices, alongside an intensification of farming and an increasingly literate population, have likewise played their part (see also Goody 1982: 99). The several ice-cream parlours that now populate the main streets of the local town, for example, would have been unsustainable at a time when there was no way of efficiently manufacturing, transporting or storing ice-cream, even if consumers had been made ready for it through mass media. What I am interested in here, however, is how these changes, alongside more subtle alterations to domestic and celebratory meals, have been used by those among whom I worked to signify class and/or to distinguish themselves as being more civilized and cultured than others. It is to this that I now turn.

### **Class and food in provincial Andhra Pradesh**

In the public sphere, the small-town restaurants and the takeaway joints I have described offered new and evolving contexts in which identities and status could be struggled over and asserted. In offering 'foreign' dishes – not only Chinese and Western but also unfamiliar specialties from other parts of India – the food served up in such places to some extent broke free of the references to caste inherent in everyday domestic cuisine and enabled a commensality based on other factors. In the domestic context, the presence or otherwise of heating alliums, *masalas* and meat or eggs, or the complexity of the meal, alongside concerns about who cooked the rice and the order in which people might eat, are all heavily coded with caste. Food taken from the home to share with others outside could also be problematic for the same reasons. My friend John Paul, a tailor from an ex-untouchable caste, complained to me that when he took festival sweetmeats prepared by his mother to share with colleagues at the shop he worked in, most of them made excuses not to

eat them. He told me that they would not say so explicitly, but he was sure it was because they were all from higher castes than he was.

In contemporary food outlets outside the home, by contrast, where food is externally prepared and seen as separate from domestic cuisine, usually fried rather than boiled, and the items on offer sit outside usual classifications, those sharing it can do so on an equal footing, their relative status not defined by caste differences but by their shared capacity to partake of modernity and to consider themselves 'educated'. For example, non-vegetarian food, in such contexts, might reference high class status, in contrast to the still persistent idea that vegetarianism might increase caste status (Srinivas 1952: 226; cited in Goody 1982: 115; Desai 2008). Local student parties in their shared hostels operated in a similar way: the snacks served – either fried takeaway items or, more commonly, shop-bought Western-style cakes (sweet), *chivda*/mixture (savoury) and bottled fizzy drinks – allowed for a commensality that was both 'safe'<sup>10</sup> and cosmopolitan. For youth I knew in the village, partaking in these kinds of food-sharing events signalled generational differences and a 'youth culture' that was imperceptible back in the 1980s, when there appeared less to differentiate food consumption across generations. They also gave them identities that simultaneously separated them from their peers who did not attend school or college but worked for daily wages in the fields or local factories and forged and sustained new relationships with their fellow diners. Drawing on the criteria used by the likes of Fuller and Narasimhan's (2007) successful IT professionals to define themselves as middle class – education, aspiration and cosmopolitan consumption – these young men and women identified themselves, even when they fell short of the ideal, in relation to the growing urban middle classes.

While partaking in the modern foods that globalization, industrialization of production and economic liberalization had made possible was an important part of this social positioning, simply eating noodles or pizza with friends was not in itself sufficient to warrant social elevation. Demonstrating that one was educated and modern – prerequisites to performing new middle classness – also required corresponding postures and styles, and these were also best learned and shown off through public consumption. Eating out at traditional 'meals hotels', while also public, was essentially an individualized rather than social affair: diners would eat quickly with minimal conversation, their faces turned to their food rather than their fellow diners. Background noise is provided by the clatter of stainless steel *thalis* and bellowed demands for more rice and *sambar* rather than, as is the case in the newer style of food

outlet, the chatter of fellow diners, who take more time over their food. 'In the West you sip your drinks', an older village friend once said to me as he watched me drink a glass of beer during an all-male social event. 'I've seen it in American films. Here, we pour it down as quickly as possible!' The student generation, however, was also more likely to sip its drinks – at least their Coca-Colas or Limcas<sup>11</sup> in ice-cream parlours and other social eating places – and masticated its snack food slowly and deliberately. The opposite style of eating – using the full palm and not just the finger tips to combine the rice with the curry; throwing the food into one's mouth rather than placing it there; face down turned towards the plate; eating with an open mouth and spitting out unwanted stems, pods and pips directly on to the floor; and openly belching at the end of a meal – was described to me by one informant, a middle-caste ranking woman in her 40s, as 'a very low caste way of eating' (Staples 2008: 48). Others of comparable status made similar remarks throughout my fieldwork. Her reference was to caste rather than class, but in as much as her disparaging comment referred to a performance rather than an intrinsic quality,<sup>12</sup> it could – through practice, conscious or otherwise – be changed. And this was precisely what happened among my younger informants as they learned to conduct themselves in particular ways through shared dining experiences with their peers. Through the dining experiences afforded by the new contexts that were opening up in small towns throughout the region where I worked, the relatively educated descendants of rural peasant and labouring classes could lay claim, through the cultivation of certain styles, to something akin to middle class status. This middle class more broadly establishes and identifies itself by, as Liechty puts it, 'engaging in cultural practices that weave together cultural paradigms...such as caste-oriented notions of prestige, orthodoxy and propriety and new market-driven, mass-mediated values and desires' (Liechty 2005: 3). Those with whom I worked often lacked the economic means fully to sustain the lifestyle this required, but food-sharing events with their classmates enabled them to embody the appropriate values and to perform them successfully in particular contexts. I argue that, in doing so, they used food to play around with the class-based categories that might otherwise have excluded them.

Even a more conservative older generation, for all its benign bemusement at the youthful penchant for stir-fried noodles and pizza, did not remain untouched by what was happening in the world beyond their own domestic settings. As noted above, the ready availability of keenly priced savoury accompaniments to rice-based meals from 'curry points' had already allowed for a diversification of tastes within households

and to free up women's time (see Staples n.d.). The greater availability of ingredients in the market and shops – combined with widespread bottled-gas provision over firewood for cooking and products, like rice, that had already been mechanically processed before purchase – also enabled the preparation of a wider range of dishes than in the past. These factors had so far had only a small impact on most household's day-to-day diets, but changes, particularly in the ways hospitality was performed, were more noticeable when I was invited for dinner. During my earliest visits to the village, on such occasions I was mostly fed separately from other family members – the latter either waited outside or were involved in the cooking and serving. I would typically be seated on a mat inside the house and served by my host on to a steel plate from central pots of rice (in very large quantities), a main non-vegetarian curry<sup>13</sup> – possibly *dhal* or *sambar* – and usually curd and pickle. This would invariably be followed by a steel tumbler of *semiya* (a runny milk-based sweet with vermicelli, dried fruit and coconut). My host would check on me intermittently as I ate, topping up my plate until I protested with sufficient force that I could eat no more. In a few households, I am still fed like this, but, increasingly, social dinners have drawn inspiration both from media and from the local restaurants I have described. In terms of food provided, the number and variety of side dishes has increased and, rather than being served from central pots, are these days more likely to be offered in smaller, individual serving dishes lined up alongside my plate – now often china or plastic – along with rice and sometimes *chapattis*. A shop-bought milk sweet, some *chivda* or potato crisps might precede the meal, and fried coconut rice or *puli-hora* will frequently be offered before boiled white rice. Dessert, more likely in a glass bowl than a steel tumbler, is usually still vermicelli and milk-based but these days is prepared in a variety of ways, with greater attention given to presentation. Bananas, mangoes or less common fruit – such as apples – might also be offered to end the meal. I am often provided with a bottle of mineral water (previously unavailable) rather than water drawn from the municipal tap or, as in the past, from the well, and increasingly I am seated on a chair at a tablecloth-covered table rather than on the floor. Bottled fizzy drinks, now available cold from neighbours with fridges, will most likely be offered at the end of the meal.

Perhaps the biggest change, however, is that my hosts are now much more likely to remain in the room while I eat, with male members of the household – and in one or two cases even the women – sometimes eating at the same time, often facing me rather than positioned in a

line.<sup>14</sup> The television, once a marker of affluence but now ubiquitous in Bethany houses, is often turned on, tuned into a foreign station (for my benefit) to a Telugu movie or a music channel. And even though the focus during the meal itself is on eating rather than on conversation, there is considerably more social exchange than there would have been in the past and, because guests have been provided with their own portions in separate serving dishes, there is less sustained pressure to eat more. While this may in part have to do with increasing familiarity between myself those who feed me and/or with their trying to meet the needs of a foreigner, these shifts are nevertheless notable for the ways in which they reference the modern restaurant rather than the traditional 'meals hotel', while the tableware – including flowery plates and glass dessert bowls, available now from fancy stores in the town – mirrors that used by affluent characters in soap operas and films, or depicted in newspaper and television lifestyle advertisements. In the past, the limited range of goods in the local market restricted my informants' capacities to do this, even had the knowledge of such products been there, but market reforms have made available a much wider range of goods, including cheap replicas of items perceived as prestigious, through which small differentials in status might be asserted. Plastic moulded tumblers designed to resemble crystal glassware, for example, locally spoke of greater sophistication than the conventional stainless steel cups even if, on a broader stage, they might also be perceived of as examples of 'bazaar-kitsch' (Pinney 1995). In short, the provision of such meals and the way in which they are hosted says something about how the hosts see themselves and want to be seen in terms of social status – a development made possible through wider socio-economic and political change.

Further referents for the way the village families among whom I worked communicated status through entertaining were the weddings and other celebratory feasts put on by their more affluent peers in the local neighbourhood. For example, Sri Venkata Reddy, a local businessman who employed a couple of colony members and served as a trustee of a local NGO that supported some of the community's welfare programmes, hosted a vast lunch for 4000 diners to mark the completion of his new house to which I was invited. Served in sittings on long, disposable-tablecloth-covered trestle tables arranged in the street in front of his new house, even those who were not invited appeared to be well versed in what was being served and how, several sharing with me the cost of the gold-foil covered disposable plates ('Rs. 4 each piece!') and other items associated with the meal. Diners were served

appetizers of crisps, mixture and sweetmeats, followed by a seemingly endless range of vegetable fries and curries (I lost count after the first ten), incorporating exotic vegetables and cooking techniques from other parts of India; two types of rice enriched with ghee; *sambar*, dhal and rasam; several chutneys; curd and *raita*; poppadoms; bananas; a sweet *payasam*; and – as a digestive – sweet *paan*.

Although the quantities of food served were so vast that they rendered much of the meal inedible (in some ways it was more of a potlatch than a dinner), as a statement of Venkata Reddy's status and economic success, the feast – spoken of in awe for a long time afterwards by many of those I worked with – achieved its purpose. Most of my informants could not hope to compete in terms of scale but some of the more economically well placed among them could replicate elements of the meal and its structure in hosting their own celebrations.

Finally, my village-based informants also attempted to assert superior status by negative comparisons with those caricatured as 'the poor' and 'the uneducated'. Attending a celebratory meal at the house of a family of rag pickers in Hyderabad during my fieldwork in 2006, for example, my research assistant Das – himself a leprosy-affected man who lived in Bethany – warned me not to raise my expectations. 'These kind of people', he said – conflating caste, class and education in that single phrase – 'won't know how to cook or serve in a proper way. Back in Bethany we've had more exposure, more education, but these people haven't had that'. In the event, although the food tasted fine to me, there was only one curry, served direct from the cooking vessel to the plate, and it was accompanied with a strongly spiced *pilau* rice heavy with oil – food which, from Das's point of view, lacked refinement.

In a similar distancing of themselves from those with less sophisticated tastes, when I accompanied a group of young village men from Bethany on a sponsored cycle ride through the state, fed along the way by various small NGOs and Rotary Clubs, the quality of the food was often a source of consternation.<sup>15</sup> The men were visibly offended after being given, at one of our stops, a meal that was considered 'the kind of thing they might eat in very poor villages'. The low quality of the meat, the lack of subtlety in the spicing and the thinness of the *dhal* had been taken to convey a lack of respect from the host. Here, then, it was not that the food offered reflected the low status of those who offered it; on the contrary, it suggested to the diners that their hosts had considered them as a low-status group to whom roughly spiced curries made with the cheapest ingredients would be acceptable. The village men had rejected this classification through their sullen response to the

meal – they ate silently and refused seconds – and their eagerness to leave as soon as we had eaten.

In short, then, among the people with whom I worked – even the youth who had been fortunate enough to complete college and get jobs – the middle-class was generally understood as being other people, elsewhere. Nevertheless, in mimicking their styles and tastes and, in so doing, embodying them, they succeeded, at various points, in blurring the social boundaries between themselves and their wealthier, urban peers. Buying into a system that judged them on their social sophistication – their capacity to perform the values of the ‘educated’ and the ‘modern’ – rather than their birth-ascribed status also offered them greater opportunities for social elevation.

## Conclusion

When Goody published *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (1982) 30 years ago, the ambitious sweep of his approach took the anthropology of food beyond a contest between materialist and symbolic explanations to demonstrate just how far the symbolic and the material are each constitutive of the other. He showed how a multiplicity of concerns – from the local to the global, from beliefs about the ritual purity of food to the processes of production and distribution – variously converge to constitute and shape particular foodways. As such, anthropologists need to be attentive to the relationships between consumption, production and the socio-economic order; to the constraints they might impose on what and how people eat and to external socio-cultural influences. In addition to how food is produced, our investigations also need to explore how it is then distributed and prepared and the contexts in which it is then eaten. Taking a cue from Goody, I have attempted to be mindful of these wider influences at the same time as zooming in on the specific eating practices of those I worked with and to trace the multiple implications of the former for the latter.

Goody was also correct to point out that food in India is culturally differentiated – not only in terms of a high and a low cuisine, which his broad brush, comparative approach illuminates, but also in multiple ways across different social contexts to demarcate more subtle differences in terms of status and identity – and asserted proactively to bring about change in one’s social position. Specifically, I have attempted to chronicle how changes in what people consume in South India have been changed by two major recent historical shifts over the past half century. The first is the Green Revolution and the technologies that have

sprung from it, which occurred from the late 1960s onwards. This has led to an increasing industrialization of food production and helps to account for, among other things, the widespread availability of rice – mechanically dehusked as opposed to hand-pounded – and significant changes in the relative costs of different types of meat. Hand-in-hand with these developments in farming have been advances in technologies and infrastructure which have, for example, made possible the distribution of food stuffs over greater distances – and therefore the introduction of ‘exotic’ ingredients to places where they were not previously available – and a sufficiently stable electricity supply for restaurateurs to incorporate frozen ingredients into their dishes. Secondly, the market reforms that have occurred since the early 1990s have made for the availability of a greater range of goods through which distinctions might be expressed and a greater flow of images and ideas that have informed how the wider selection of material goods might be channelled into the cultivation of new identities. The incorporation of Chinese and so-called continental items into the diets of some people in provisional towns, for example, is an indication of how material and technological changes have been harnessed in the expression of cosmopolitan tastes, while replicating the dining styles illustrated in television and magazine advertisements would simply not have been possible prior to the mass production of melamine plates and crystal-effect glassware.

As I have also attempted to show, however, these macro-structural shifts and the kaleidoscope of effects they have at micro-level do not simply impose mechanistic responses in what and how the people I worked with ate. Rather, they opened up, and/or constricted opportunities to constitute identities through food that people responded to in divergent ways (compare Abbots, this volume). The kinds of material changes I have outlined above are variously used to assert, redefine and contest existing social categories and to create new ones. Young people with access to a college education from relatively poor backgrounds, for example, were seizing the opportunities presented by ‘modern’ foods that incorporated ‘exotic’ ingredients to replicate the styles of a young, urban middle class to which they were exposed via media (film, advertising, the internet and social media) and, when they or siblings went to study in outside colleges, via direct experience. This also facilitated the learning and embodiment of styles, habits and manners through which middle-class qualities might more effectively be performed. The bodily dispositions associated with low-caste status – deferential movements, down-turned heads, bodies literally bent downwards through years of prostrating themselves in front of their putative superiors and

uncultivated styles of eating – were replaced, through alternative practices, with more confident, relaxed and open movements, dress styles that mimicked expensive fashions and the increased screening out of what Douglas called ‘irrelevant organic processes’ (1996: 76) during eating to provide contexts in which ‘civilized’ social intercourse could take place.<sup>16</sup> Young families, too, adopted similar styles in hosting dinners for outside guests – such as myself – that also showed them to be ‘modern’ and ‘educated’: terms associated with middle-class membership.

Although the engagements with food I have described allowed for a greater fluidity in social status, in conclusion it is also worth noting that while mimicry of urban middle-class identities enabled more of my informants to negotiate their relative status than might have been possible in the past, such strategies were not open to everyone. The comment that ‘the middle class gets bigger and richer but those at the bottom are still as poor as ever they were’ was made, in as many words, by so many of my informants that it became a cliché: in order for some to increase their status, it remained necessary – as some of my ethnographic examples also make clear – to have the poor, the uneducated and the uncouth as reference points against which to measure their own elevation. And in a milieu where there were more foods, more recipes, more styles of eating and presentation – as well as a limiting of animals and fish once free for hunting and of land available for public grazing – not having access to the discourses of social sophistication made those at the bottom of the heap all the poorer.

## Notes

1. The dynamic relationship between rapidly changing class structures and food practices is discussed in very different ethnographic contexts by Abbotts (this volume) and Clark (this volume).
2. In rural Andhra Pradesh, for example, my informants recognized members of Kapu and Reddi castes – both from the Sudra, or lowest, *varna* – as socially important because they owned a disproportionate amount of farming land compared to other castes.
3. Although not exclusively: Fuller and Narasimhan (2007: 135) note that the IT professionals with whom they worked in Chennai did not exhibit the anxiety commonly attributed to those of their social strata.
4. Fifty eight per cent of households questioned in a survey I conducted in 2011.
5. See also Harriss-White (2004), for more on subsidized food in the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu.
6. For confirmation of this ordering, see also Chitra Banerji’s evocative descriptions of Bengali cuisine (2008: xv, 3–28).

7. Sorghum was more popular among those I knew from Cuddapah and from Rajamundry, both slightly north of where Kumari came from, where I was told it grew particularly well. In both places, I was told, *rotis* – flat bread – were also made from sorghum flour.
8. See the Rice Knowledge Management Portal – [www.rkmp.co.in](http://www.rkmp.co.in) – accessed 5 January 2012, which, in addition to providing trends in rice production across India, also records how developments in rice production were managed first by the All India Co-ordinated Rice Improvement Project in 1965, and from 1975, by the Directorate of Rice Research.
9. There were already bars in the town, but these were exclusively male domains and even for them were not considered respectable. Even the town's bars, however, are becoming more upmarket and comfortable, suggesting that they, too, are taking cues from the pub-style bars popular among upper middle class, cosmopolitan youth – both male and female – in cities like Hyderabad and New Delhi.
10. See also Liechty (2005: 21), who cites an elderly Nepali mother's warning that eating outside the household 'opens the door to evil spells, spirits and witchcraft'.
11. Limca, along with Thums Up!, Maaza, Campa Cola and Gold Spot were among the Indian brands that dominated the fizzy drinks market prior to the economic reforms of the 1990s. Most of these brands were subsequently bought up by the Coca-Cola company and sold alongside its own global brands, with Pepsi as the main competitor.
12. Even if, as my informant would have argued, it was an intrinsic quality that led to the performance.
13. This would usually have been chicken or goat although, as I did not eat meat but ate seafood, in my case would have been fish.
14. Osella and Osella (2008: 186–187) note – following Mayer (1996) – the specifically Hindu practice of diners 'eating sitting in a line, not looking at each other', compared to their Muslim informants who ate together in a large circle.
15. As I have also discussed elsewhere – see Staples (2008: 45).
16. See also Säävälä (2003) – who draws in turn on Bourdieu (1984; 1990) – on 'low-caste' habitus.

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# 5

## The Fast and the Fusion: Class, Colonialism and the Remaking of *Comida Típica* in Highland Ecuador

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### Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the way in which *comida típica* (defined as typical, local food) is being reconfigured and reproduced and interplays with class subjectivities, in the greater Cuenca region of the Ecuadorian Andes. Goody famously argued that ‘culinary differentiation ... is linked to a particular kind of hierarchy, with distinct styles of life’ (1982: 105) and demonstrated not only that food is a marker of social differentiation but also that the relational valuation of foods and food sites is structurally informed by class position and social hierarchies.<sup>1</sup> Expanding on this thesis, I look to identify the orientations – in time and space – that underpin class-based eating practices. These orientations – whether directed towards the pre-colonial past, Spain and the colonial encounter, North American modernity or global cosmopolitanism – are one of the scaffolds on which class distinctions are built and performed. Furthermore, they are woven into the very fabric of regional belonging and provide social actors with the means through which to create differing class-based regional subjectivities. I argue that being Cuencano – and eating Cuencano – is a very different experience from the subject position of, to draw on the ethnographic examples discussed below, those living within migrant-peasant households, a member of the lower urban classes, a North American retired expatriate aspiring to an alternative lifestyle or a middle-class professional concerned with the erosion of cultural heritage. Throughout, I aim to show that these different actors invoke divergent notions of ‘local’ Cuencano and global foods, and

entwined within this are conflicting perspectives on the region's historical, and current, political and economic relations, and its place on the national and world stage.

The boundaries between local and global have, of course, been blurred, with a number of studies demonstrating the creative process through which global elements and commodities, including food, are incorporated, refashioned and reimagined in culturally meaningful and locally specific ways (Miller 1995; 1998; Jing 2000; Watson 1997; Wilk 1999). As Wilk (2002) shows us, the global – rather than homogenizing and eradicating local diversity – can become a sign of local distinctiveness. Yet, as Caldwell (2004) points out, these discussions often imply that distinctly local traits and practices, into which the global is incorporated, can be isolated and identified; although, in highlighting the culturally specific local processes through which McDonalds becomes 'domesticated' in Moscow, she arguably falls into a similar trap. Consequently, in their efforts to blur the global-local dichotomy, these studies can ironically reinforce those very same distinctions they seek to challenge, and 'the local' continues to be reified. This chapter moves forward from this position and argues, through the lens of fusionism and creolization, that there is no 'authentic' local core. Rather, I aim to demonstrate that the production of 'typical' foods is an ongoing dynamic process of creolization through which dishes are concomitantly remade as Cuencano and the meaning of 'local' redefined from relative class position. My own position is therefore akin to Appadurai's (1986) argument that the local is continually produced, and I elucidate how these processes are informed by, and dialectically shape, class relations and the orientations in space and time on which they are, at least, partially founded.

I use the term 'creolization' deliberately. Caribbeanists have been critical of the term's use to account for the politically benign process of multicultural 'mixing' outside of the Caribbean *oikumene*,<sup>2</sup> arguing that it exclusively refers to the process of culture building within the violent context of slavery, colonialism and the plantation system (cf. Mintz 2010; Mintz and Price 1992; Sheller 2003). Yet in making this argument, they have drawn attention to the power dynamics that characterize creolization, and it is these deep political structures that I am interested in exploring in the non-Caribbean, yet colonized, context of Cuenca. Moreover, both Caribbeanists and those who have used the term creolization more widely point to the ways in which cultures should be seen in processual terms, with Hannerz calling for us to focus on the interrelations – rather than the autonomy – through which

diverse cultural practices are created (1987: 550–555). Hence he, like Mintz, suggests that creolization implies the absence of an incumbent ‘local’ and points to a more historically continuous process of globalization through which the local is produced – a thread that has been taken up in relation to food practices by Wilk’s (2006) account of the creation of creolized, yet also Belizean, ‘cuisine’. It is these core sentiments – the lack of an incumbent local and the continuous production of local(s) through interplay framed by structural inequities – that most accurately reflect the making of *comida típica* in Cuenca.

However, not all foods are discursively acknowledged by Cuencanos as creole, and this paper focuses on three food sites and four social groups. First I examine rural cultural fairs, in which *cuy* (roast guinea pig), among other dishes, is publically celebrated as a symbol of tradition and local culture by the professional middle classes (thereafter middle classes) but less so by the migrant-peasantry. I then turn to address Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), which expatriates and some members of the middle classes regard as a homogenizing, North American import, but the lower urban classes, particularly the younger generation, see as a continuation of a long history of cultural encounters. Finally, I turn to the restaurants ‘Tiestos’ and ‘El Maiz’, both of which market ‘fusion cuisine’ to a middle class and expatriate clientele.

Drawing on Goody (1982), and also Bourdieu (1984), I ask why these three sites are subject to differing valuations of fusionism and creolization and argue that class informs the ways in which foods are variably categorized and publically celebrated. In particular, like Goody, I show that higher value foods – and food practices – tend to be those that are initially deemed exogenous, for example rice and the European meal structure. Unfortunately *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* bypassed the Americas, but Cuenca, as will become evident, has been subject to many of the processes that Goody describes in relation to both Africa and Eurasia, including increasing mass access to industrial and ‘exogenous’ foods, the elevation of peasant food and its creolized transformation into haute cuisine, and the reiteration of both social and culinary hierarchies. Yet, while I agree with Goody that we can see ‘conflict over cuisine as a facet of class’ (Goody 1982: 136) and aim to elucidate some of these tensions in a Latin American context, my analysis is far less structurally inclined and clear cut, and I show that competing categorizations of food are not fixed, as Goody shows in relation to, for example, forms of alcohol consumption in Ghana (Goody 1982: 184–185), but rather overlap and are in a state of continual flux. Goody’s analysis, as he himself hints, is problematized by globalization, and

he suggests that industrialization and the mass importation of foreign foods potentially 'rubs out' internal differences (Goody 1982: 3). The ethnography from Cuenca questions this assumption and demonstrates that differentiation has not diminished with the easy availability of once-luxurious, rare and expensive foods but has rather taken on new forms (compare Watson, this volume and Staples, this volume). We thereby have to go beyond 'class' as an explanation and identify the spatio-temporal sites that underpin class dynamics and, in turn, the valuations of particular foods and food sites in an historically globalized context.

Before continuing, a brief note on the class structure in Cuenca may be helpful. Not unsurprisingly in a region that was subject to Spanish colonization, class and ethnicity intersect, and although all of my Cuencano research participants of all classes define themselves as *mestizo* (mixed-race), there are multiple levels of *mestizo*-ness that are just as much based on cultural attributes and performances as they are skin tone. Hence, surnames, level of education, profession, dress, mannerisms and food practices all contribute to, and reflect, one's class. These distinctions are also spatial, with those from the city generally being regarded as more 'cultured' – read higher class – than those from the *campo* (countryside), a topology that also plays out in Cuenca's restaurant scene. As such, cultural capital and class performance (Bourdieu 1984) is just as important, if not more so, as economic income and, although the peasantry and lower classes are historically more impoverished than their 'whiter', more urban counterparts, the enhanced mobility of the lower classes (fuelled by remittance incomes<sup>3</sup>), the emergence of a burgeoning middle class and both inward and outward migration is potentially disrupting the established class order. Consequently, this discussion focuses on the public, rather than domestic, food performances,<sup>4</sup> and much of what I describe below can be interpreted as a series of public challenges to, and reassertions of, social hierarchies and class distinctions.

### **Cultural fairs: promoting Cañari or *Mestizo* foods**

The 'Jima Health Fair', as it was entitled, took place in the eponymous village, a small rural community still defined as '*campo*' despite declining smallholder agriculture and increasing – remittance fuelled – urbanization in the form of large villas and parking lots. Jima, like many of its neighbours, is a migrant exporting village, and it is against the backdrop of rising remittance prosperity, conspicuous consumption and

shifting labour relations that the Jima Tourist Foundation promoted the health fair as a cultural event. The Foundation is an organization that was instigated by the Peace Corps and is managed by middle-class professionals who tend to commute in from Cuenca city. The ostensible purpose of the fair was to encourage the migrant-peasant class to follow a healthier lifestyle and, in addition to the formal presentations, villagers were encouraged to set up informal market stalls selling 'healthy food'. Guidelines were firmly laid down; there were to be no carbonated drinks, lager, hamburgers or fries on sale – a prohibition seemingly in accord with the fair's objective – whereas *cuy* (a dish that is relatively high in fat) served with rice, potatoes and corn, *empanadas* (deep-fried cheese-filled pastries) and corn-based products including *chicha* (a beer) were not just allowed, but encouraged.

'These are our traditional foods', proclaimed Jorge, the chair of the Foundation and a head teacher, to the congregated villagers, 'the Incas were here, but not for very long. Before the area – all of Sigsig canton – was Cañari, and it is our Cañari traditions and Cañari foods that live on today. The *mestizo* town of Jima has Cañari origins and traditions, and *this* gives us our culture.' (my emphasis)

Thus the sanctioned dishes were presented as originating from a space and time that predates not only Spanish but also Incan colonization. This claim is not surprising when situated within a broader political context that has seen the state, and the governing classes shift from the previously hegemonic discourse of *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento* (cultural mixing and whiteness) towards pluriculturalism.<sup>5</sup> As I have argued elsewhere (Abbots 2009), this reorientation towards the Cañari past not only serves to construct the greater Cuenca region as culturally distinct from its national rivals but also reasserts nationalist sentiment by establishing distance from its, current politically unattractive, historical affiliations with neighbouring Peru.

The Foundation's definition of *comida típica* as Cañari was not, however, reproduced in the stall holders' presentation of the dishes on sale. These sellers were drawn primarily from the migrant-peasant class, and their definitions of dishes revealed a greater level of ambiguity than may have been expected from reading more structural, dichotomous accounts of indigenous and exogenous foods (cf. Goody 1982, see also Weismantel 1988). I found this ambiguity consistently in the culinary discourse of the migrant-peasantry, and during the health fair they

focused on the Jimeño-ness of their food, as materially manifested in the flavour of the meat:

We have delicious local *cuy* here, fed on local grass. Our *cuy* is the healthiest, most natural and the tastiest. It's fed on local grass for a delicious flavour.

(Felicia)

The migrant-peasantry also inverted the objective of the fair and used it as an opportunity to publically display the extensive contents of their kitchen, their use of mechanized spit-roasting machines and their employment of domestic servants. Or, in other words, they used the fair as a site to express their social mobility and modernity, not their Cañari heritage.

As Felicia's sales pitch above indicates, the migrant-peasantry also see *cuy* as typical and being 'from here', but the 'here' invoked is less fixed to the Cañari past than the 'here' of the middle classes, as epitomized by Jorge's presentation. This lack of reference to the indigenous past is commonplace among the lower rural classes who, contrary to the arguments put forward by Weismantel (1988) – and also in tone by Goody (1982) – tend not to make distinctions between Spanish and indigenous foods. Rather their definitions of *comida típica* are more ambiguous, sometimes conflicting and often contradictory, and when asked to divide typical foods into indigenous/Cañari and white/Spanish domains, members of migrant-peasant households were unable, or unwilling, to make distinct correlations between dishes and social categories. I say 'unwilling' because, at times, when the issue was pushed, my research participants would emphasize the indigeneity of other people's foods, while distancing themselves from them. But indigeneity in this context is not associated with a fixed Cañari domain but rather an unspecified past. As Anita, who always used white flour, illustrates in relation to the correct method of preparing *empanadas*:

You should use wholemeal flour; it's the indigenous way, like the *indígenas* at the health fair. You remember, they used wholemeal flour, it's the proper way: it's how they made them a long time ago.

Anita's distancing between her own practices and those of the *indígenas* also suggests that the migrant-peasantry's ambiguous definition of *comida típica* can be understood with reference to their current class position. Adding more nuance to Goody's (1982) thesis, Bourque (2001)

notes the symbolic resonance of foods is relative to the subject position of the consumer and shows how *mestizos* in the city do not regard their consumption of *cuy* as compromising their *mestizo*-ness, while those in an 'Indian' peasant village take steps to publically distance themselves from the meat, as it is understood to compound their Indianness. Thus, in the rural context the 'low' social status of the meat is exacerbated and dialectically compounds the lower status of the consumer, whereas the negative associations of the dish are absorbed and nullified in the higher status urban setting. A similar process occurs in Jima, and the middle classes, by being more structurally anchored to Spain – through profession, education, surname and living in the city – can socially afford to orientate themselves ideologically to the Cañari past and 'low' foods, whereas the migrant-peasantry, whose mobility is relatively recent, are still carrying the 'baggage' of being a member of the rural lower classes. Their *mestizo*-ness is not as secure, and they are consequently not in a social position to participate in 'low' consumption practices that potentially symbolically draws attention to their 'indigenous' side. As such, differentiation occurs, and culinary hierarchies produced, but this is not as neat or fixed as Goody (1982) infers.

This is not to state that the Spanish and pre-colonial histories of particular dishes are not of any import to the migrant-peasantry, as it potentially informs their understanding of the relative status of some foods. For example, *cuy* is always domestically cooked over bonfires in the hidden spaces of the back yard or publically roasted with the help of domestic servants and assorted kitchen paraphernalia, while pigs, introduced by the Spanish, are generally slaughtered, butchered and spit-roasted in full view on the front lawn. Rather, the migrant-peasantry's reluctance to classify foods as Spanish and Cañari suggests that these historical distinctions, or orientations, are less meaningful to them than they are to the middle classes, and this, at least in part, is due to their position in the social order. They therefore circumnavigate the negative social connotations of eating low status 'indigenous' food, such as *cuy*, by refusing to acknowledge the category. Thus, instead of defining foods based on whether they are Spanish or Cañari, they combine both together under the general, rather hazy and elastic rubric of 'from here'.

This argument does not, of course, necessarily suggest that the members of migrant-peasant class define *comida típica* as creole for, in general, they rarely attempt to locate the specific geographies and histories of dishes. Yet, they do commonly define *comida típica* as the 'food of our ancestors', and it is strongly associated with kinship. This implies a

creole sentiment; all my research participants define themselves as *mestizo*, and their ancestors are also understood to be mixed-race or creole. Others may not always see the migrant-peasantry in this way, but the threads of pre-Columbian and Spanish colonial histories are entangled in each individual's personal biography: by dwelling in Jima they have thus created a *mestizo* village, with *mestizo* traditions. 'Here' is therefore a distinctly creole place. Jorge, above, may prefer to emphasize the Cañari aspects of *mestizo*-ness, but the migrant-peasantry do not have recourse to this category. It is absent from their classificatory process. And, it is this very absence of defined sites, and its replacement with *mestizo*, that can be seen as indicative of the extent that creolization has occurred. The lack of ability, or desire, to disentangle these threads indicates not only the salience of both the pre-Hispanic and Spanish pasts but also the extent to which they have become melded together. Moreover, from their subject position, the migrant-peasantry appear to have little political incentive to disentangle the Cañari threads of *comida típica*, whereas the middle classes are both in a socio-economic position and have the ideological inspiration to do so. These different ideological class-based orientations become even more pronounced in terms of fast food and the relative engagement with multinational chains, and it is to those that I now turn.

### **'Global' fast food chains: keeping traditions alive**

The multinational KFC is the most popular of the fast food sites consumed in Cuenca, particularly among the semi-rural and urban lower- and lower-middle classes. This popularity is not limited to the younger generation; teenagers and students are regular visitors but so are office workers, teachers, petty entrepreneurs, and on Sundays, many families will head to the malls on the outskirts of the city for the primary purpose of sharing a meal at KFC. The only social groups who are conspicuous by their absence are the increasing number of North American expatriates, older members of *Los Noblos* – a 'white' landed and political elite class who trace their ancestry to the Spanish *hacendados* (hacienda owners) – and members of the middle classes. This division is not surprising and reflects the spatio-temporal orientations of these social groups. Like the migrant-peasantry, many of the younger generation and the lower classes are the children and wives of global migration and have husbands, sons and brothers living, semi-permanently, in the United States. Since major economic collapses in the late 1980s and 1990s, gendered migration has been the primary economic strategy for the majority for

lower class rural and urban households. Consequently the consumption and display of US symbols, whether in the form of architecture, clothing or food, has become a key mechanism for expressing the robustness of transnational kinship relations and the reputation of migrants, both as economic providers and moral family men (Abbots 2012a). Thus the increasingly prosperous lower classes, funded by remittances, are forging new sites of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1984) and routes of social mobility, and are no longer looking to emulate those above them in the social order.

As indicated by the food prohibitions and presentations at the Jima Health Fair, this form of conspicuous consumption is a source of alarm to the middle classes, who have adopted a number of measures to curtail the social and cultural changes being instigated by migration and remittance prosperity. Likewise, the presence and popularity of the multinational chains is both a source of disappointment and consternation to the expatriate community, who have moved to Cuenca to 'live a simple life, away from all those industrialized food chains'. Thus KFC challenges their romantic notion that living in Cuenca will be 'like living in the 1950s in the USA' (unattributed, International Living website, 'Why Ecuador', accessed 18 March 2010) by epitomizing, in their eyes, the worst form of industrial, pathogen-laden form of food production and North American cultural imperialism. As Josie sighed on sighting a branch of KFC: 'I can't help but think that we export the worst of American culture to these countries – it's embarrassing'.<sup>6</sup>

By contrast, those eating in the multinational chains tend to regard their presence as a symbol of regional and national strength and see KFC and Burger King as illustrative of Ecuador's and Cuenca's arrival, and integration, into the global economy. 'Why shouldn't we have them; everybody else has' was a common refrain. Moreover, the absence of a McDonalds restaurant in Cuenca, in comparison to its presence in Quito and Guayaquil, Ecuador's first and second cities, is a source of constant irritation that is felt so strongly that a Facebook campaign entitled 'Bring McDonalds to Cuenca' was recently initiated. Postings to this site suggest that a strong sense of regionalism runs alongside a fear that Cuenca is somehow 'less outward-orientated and global' than its regional rivals. Thus regional tensions between Cuenca and its larger cousins are being played out through 'global' symbols, and there is a sense that the multinationals validate Cuenca as an equitable player on the world stage.

In contrast to the commonly cited fears that global chains are leading to the homogenization and eradication of 'local' cultures and food

practices – a view that is also commonly expressed by expatriates and the middle classes, who regard the offerings of the chains as ‘dangerous’ and contaminating to culture (see also Abbotts 2012b; 2013) – Cuencano consumers of KFC emphasize both the strength and the fluidity of the regional creole cuisine. This strength is epitomized by Rafe, who used KFC’s adapted menu, with its *menestra* (bean stew), rice, French fries and chicken pieces, as material evidence of creolization stating: ‘our traditions, our food is very strong – they [KFC] are having to adapt to us’. Rafe thereby draws attention to the ‘grammar’ (cf. Barthes 1997; Douglas 1999) of KFC’s offering, explaining how it reflects the structure of a Cuencano meal:

you have your chicken pieces, and you’ve also got potatoes, and rice and *menestra* too – if you go to Raymipampa [a popular Cuencano café for locals and tourists alike] or Los Canibales [a Cuencano chain of spit-roasted chicken restaurants] you’ll get exactly the same.

Rafe’s understanding of KFC could be seen as a form of appropriation or ‘domestication’ (Caldwell 2004), as he incorporates the global into the local core, thereby inverting the power dynamic commonly presented by proponents of McDonaldization theory (cf. Ritzer 2010).<sup>7</sup> Yet the Cuencano meal presented as regionally ‘typical’ in this context is not one that is authentically and originally ‘local’, pre-Hispanic or even Cañari. Rather it is creole, with two of its main components, the rice and the chicken, being introduced by the Spanish *conquistadores*. This creolization is recognized, especially among consumers who are live and work in more urban or ‘professional’ contexts. As Marcelo described,

The Spanish took many things out of this country, many things – potatoes maize, and fruit, pineapple, papaya and bananas. They brought in white rice. White rice used to be called rice of the castle, because castles were the only place it went to. Only the Spanish could eat it. The Indians didn’t eat white rice. It was a rich man’s food; now, now we all eat it.

In addition, Marco incorporated rice, chicken and pork into his definition of *comida típica*, telling me, ‘when the Spanish came they ate these foods, and the indigenous people saw the Spanish people eating it and wanted it too, so they started eating it and it became typical of our food’.

Marco’s and Marcelo’s comment appear classically Goody; the emergence of a new social hierarchy produces a culinary hierarchy, with the

exogenous food of, in this context, Spain being consumed by those situated within the higher ranks of society. Marco further hints at a Bourdieusian process of emulation. The lower classes – the masses – follow the culinary trends set by those above them in the social order as the, previously exogenous, foods become more readily available – a process that Goody suggests would ‘rub out’ social differentiations (1982: 3). However, as the divergent views on KFC and *cuy* indicate and as I discuss more fully below, these differences are not diminishing but are rather being reasserted.

So here we see a conscious identification of Spanish foods and a different emphasis from that portrayed by the Jima Tourist Foundation and the rural migrant-peasant class, who, respectively, either played down or could (or would) not identify the influence of Spanish colonialism in their definition of *comida típica*. This orientation to Spain not only knits another site into the creole fabric of typical Cuencano food but also is used by consumers of KFC to highlight the fluidity and openness of the category. This process was clearly articulated by Carlos, who, in response to my question of whether hamburgers could be, or are, *comida típica*, called upon the ‘food of the ancestors’ definition to explain that ‘in four to five generations, we will be the ancestors, and we’re eating hamburgers, so of course hamburgers could be *comida típica*’. He was supported by Jenny, who introduced the concept of ‘fusion food’ into the conversation, saying, ‘hamburgers are made with local ingredients now, local sauces and served with local dishes, and this keeps traditions alive, it’s a mixing’.

Carlos and Jenny continued to invoke the discourse of *mestizaje*, emphasizing the fluidity, adaptation and creolization of Cuencano people and their foods and questioning the very notion of tradition. They interpret Cuencano food practices as being open to change and in a constant state of flux: constructing *comida típica* as the product of a series of multiple cultural encounters. In locating contemporary notions of ‘fusion’ food within a centuries-old process of miscegenation and colonization, they stressed dynamism over static traditions and questioned the notion of an authentic local ‘core’. Carlos, Jenny and Rafe are all children of migration (cf. Parreñas 2005), with fathers living in New York, but they were also conscious that as *mestizos*, they were the products of colonial relations and historical globalized trade, and from this subject position *comida típica* cannot be regarded as timeless but rather has to be seen as being subject to continuous change. Traditions are ‘kept alive’, not through constant repetition and protection but by fusing existing food grammars with

new ingredients and introducing new dishes formed of Cuencano products.

Theirs was not, however, the only approach. Other avid consumers of fast food, from the same social group, created distinctions between *comida típica* and global fast food chains, arguing that the existence of the latter reinforced the former. From this perspective, multinational fast food brands and traditional local cuisine are regarded as mutually enforcing, and a number of my participants would point to the increased visibility of cultural fairs and restaurants specializing in *comida típica* as evidence of a robust regional food heritage. Sara told me: 'fast food helps us protect our traditions, because it makes us more aware of them; it highlights them'. Victoria surmised, 'I may be here with my laptop and modern clothes and go to Burger King, but I will still teach my children our traditions – my daughters will still know how to cook *cuy*'.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, this perspective also implies recognition of the potential permeability of *comida típica*, and it is therefore not as far removed from the views of Jenny and Carlos as it initially appears. There is a sense in this discourse that boundaries must be reinforced, often by eating *comida típica* only with kin and during festive occasions, otherwise traditions, rather than being kept alive, will change beyond all recognition. As such, this more static, 'keeping the two spheres distinct' approach appears closer to the views of the Jima Tourist Foundation and the middle classes. But there is also a sense among the urban lower classes, particularly with the younger generation, that the realms of fast food and *comida típica* can sit harmoniously alongside and mutually reinforce each other, either through a process of fusion or by encouraging public recognition and valuation of 'traditional' food. Furthermore, although some, for example, Jenny and Carlos, constitute themselves as products of multiple global encounters and others, like Sara and Victoria, construct their position as being more akin to 'having a foot in both camps', all demonstrate that being a global citizen does not detract from being Cuencano – a view that challenges the middle-classes' interpretation of lower class consumption.

The desire of expatriates and the middle classes to eradicate 'fast food' in the form of multinational chains and their products from the Cuencano foodscape and the manner in which they conceive this form of consumption as damaging to cultural heritage, further, perhaps ironically, reinforce the notion that *comida típica* is not impervious to change and influence. As the views above suggest, it is also counterproductive, with the lower classes reading cultural fairs as a

'permission slip' to continue consuming fast food. Yet to depict the middle classes as inherently inward-looking would be misleading, as they commonly eat in self-styled 'fusion' restaurants, a number of which are understood to have both North American and European influences. It is to two of those restaurants that I now give my attention.

### Tiestos and El Maiz: facilitating cosmopolitanism

The restaurants *Tiestos* and *El Maiz* are part of an emerging culinary scene in Cuenca that markets 'fusion cuisine'. The variety of restaurants in the city and the range of food available have increased dramatically in the last two to three years, and while the high-end European-style restaurants that have been part of the Cuenca establishment for many years remain – echoing Goody (1982) – popular with the upper echelons of society, the 'contemporary' fusion restaurants are the preferred option for the burgeoning urban middle classes and the expatriate population.<sup>9</sup>

The El Maiz menu opens with an introduction to the role 'the sacred grain' played during the pre-Hispanic era, before explaining that 'joining the new Ecuadorian food movement, we include fusion cooking on our menu' and listing a range of dishes under this heading that include the following: mushroom *quinoa* served with parsley potatoes; chicken in a Zambo<sup>10</sup> seed and white wine sauce; *quinoa* and corn gratin with cream, white wine and mozzarella; and pork medallions in a tamarind and sherry sauce. *Tiestos* has a similar offering, proudly presenting steak in a blackberry and *ishpingo* sauce, chicken in a curry and macadamia nut sauce and *caldo* with meatballs. Sitting alongside these proclaimed 'fusion' dishes, in both restaurants, are the 'traditional' dishes of *caldo*, *seco*, *mote pillo*, *llapingachos*, trout, beef and pork, the latter three served with French fries. The setting for the presentation of this extensive range of dishes is self-consciously represented as 'typical' rural Latin America: miniatures of the *Chola Cuencana* (a folkloric female peasant<sup>11</sup>) sit on each table at *Tiestos*, and their images adorn the pale ochre walls and, as in El Maiz, there is an abundance of wood, flowers and terracotta urns.

Expatriates and the urban middle classes alike generally regard the offerings of both restaurants as 'typical' Cuencano fare. *High Life*, a Cuenca blog orientated towards the expatriate audience, reviewed El Maiz in an article entitled 'Checking out the *comida típica* scene' (2011), and of the restaurant's aim to 'rescue the gastronomic identity' of

Cuenca, the author writes, 'what a great idea, I thought, in a world where most people want to identify with what they see on American television'. However, many expatriates and Cuencano professionals also asserted a discursive distinction between the foods they regard as typical of the peasant class – *cuy*, rice, spit-roasted pork and maize – and the more 'civilized' typical food they consume. In making this distinction, they not only render the *comida típica* of the peasantry as timeless and unchanging, often consigning it to the realm of cultural heritage (compare Sobral, this volume), but also acknowledge the influence of the United States and Europe on their own 'civilized' *comida típica*. Fusion can be typical and local, it appears, when served in a more exclusive, middle-class setting, but creolization is less valued, and recognized, by the patrons of these establishments in the foods consumed in lower class, or mass-market, contexts. Moreover, in contrast to their views of KFC as a homogenizing danger, the pronounced influence of the United States and Europe is regarded as a marker of quality in 'fusion' restaurants and is publically celebrated. As Bryan noted when first introducing me to Tiestos: 'you should see the desserts there, they're just like you would get in San Francisco'.

Bryan continued to explain that it is not only the ingredients and the way they were combined that made the dishes akin to those of 'home' but also the style in which they were presented. This extends to the structure of the meal. As Quentin proclaimed over his coffee in Tiestos: 'now, that's what I call a civilized meal!' When asked to expand on this, he proceeded to list the meal structure: 'good *entrees*, the bread with the dips and relishes, a nice main course with well-cooked meat and tasty sauces, a nice beautifully presented desert, wine and good service'. Likewise, at El Maiz, Chester stated, 'now this is what I call fine dining! The presentation of the food, it's so elegant and nicely presented, nicely laid out'. He continued to compare the meal he had just enjoyed to the Other typical 'low' Cuencano meal that Rafe was so proud of complaining,

all those platefuls of rice – I don't know how they eat all those carbs – and meat with bones in – and don't even get me started on the chicken feet, urgh! It's the one thing I haven't gotten used to here yet, the bones.

North American service standards were also seen to be a marker of quality, if somewhat out of the norm. As Billy observed of the Tiestos chef:

he knows about good food and good service, and you can't get that combination in this country. They don't understand service. But he just does it right, he could be a case study for an MBA programme.

Similarly, while reminiscing on a previous meal at Tiestos, Chuck commented,

I had this great soup and main course, and man, I'm full after that, and I don't want any dessert, but he [the chef-owner] says you must try this and he brings me out this great big dessert, and so after all of that I order a cappuccino, and this massive coffee comes out. He knows how to do it right – he'd do well in Chicago, or New York, that restaurant is good enough to do well in the cities, or the burbs, back home.

These sentiments of the expatriate community were also reflected in the views of the urban middle classes who also stressed the elegance and sophistication of the food on offer and the environment in which it is consumed. However, service was less of a recurring motif in their evaluations of the restaurants, and they drew less explicit comparisons with the United States but rather identified the Cuencano ingredients, describing how they had been used creatively and valuing the mixture of different styles and stressing how it was similar, yet different, to the Other typical Cuencano food. Higher-end, defined 'fusion food' is therefore understood to have a different grammar from the food of the masses, and it is this emphasis on the setting and style of the dishes that, I suggest, helps ensure that the meals on offer at Tiestos and El Maiz are acknowledged not only as 'fusion' but also as supporting Cuenca's food heritage, while the lower-class, 'popular' North Americanism of KFC is condemned as damaging and homogenizing.

It becomes evident, then, that the production of 'higher-end' fusion food in Cuenca is resonant with Goody's (1982) discussion of the ways in which haute cuisine typically takes elements of 'indigenous' peasant foods and elevates and transforms them through the introduction of 'exogenous' elements. As Goody states, '[i]n terms of class and cuisine, the higher in the hierarchy, the wider the contacts, the broader the view. Thus the higher cuisine inevitably had to acquire ingredients from "outside"' (ibid.: 105). Yet in this case – where there is wide availability of imported ingredients that are easily accessible by the masses – 'local' and 'low' foods are mediated through scarcer US service standards and European meal grammars, not foodstuffs per se. The importance of

'differentiation' through food (ibid.: 103) thereby remains but finds new forms, beyond ingredients and luxurious exogenous products.

The popularity of self-styled fusion restaurants among the middle classes and expatriates can also be explained by the manner in which they bridge the most salient spatio-temporal sites for these groups. Expatriates come to Cuenca looking for 'a simple life and simple food' and to escape North American agro-industry and complex food chains. Yet these aspirations are very quickly contained by the reality of everyday life in Cuenca, and they not only find multinational fast food chains but also discover that typical, lower class, meals are not to their, sensory and cultural, taste (cf. Bourdieu 1984). The Cuencano middle classes also have a need to orientate themselves to sites of cultured sophistication and prestige, while keeping a foot anchored to what they regard as 'local'. Due to the value placed on cultural 'whiteness' under *mestizaje* nation-building programmes and colonization (cf. Stutzman 1981), these sources of prestige have historically been European, although more recently 'other' sites of modernity, such as Japan, have also started to come to the fore. And, as the previous hegemonic discourse of *mestizaje* is challenged by ideologies of pluriculturalism, there is renewed interest in the pre-Hispanic past. Moreover, both expatriates and the Cuencano middle classes alike take measures to distance themselves from sites they regard as being potentially homogenizing. These are commonly regarded as North American, but are conceptualized as a more mass-market, and lower class, North America than the sites with which they knowingly engage. They do not regard their celebration and patronage of restaurants such as Tiestos and el Maiz and their castigation of KFC as contradictory because from their subject position the two food spaces are poles apart, echoing Goody (1982) one is 'high cuisine' and the other 'low cuisine'. As such, the former is sophisticated and elegant, reinventing peasant 'tradition' and keeping it alive by incorporating valued 'exogenous' elements, whereas the latter is seen as over-riding cultural heritage: a perspective that, I hope to have made clear, diverges considerably from the perspectives of the urban and rural lower classes.

## Conclusion

Tiestos and El Maiz take the grammar of North American and European cuisine and populate it with Cuencano ingredients. KFC adopts the grammar of a Cuencano meal and populates it with a secret blend of herbs and spices. Whereas, the Jima Health Fair takes an acknowledged

'cultural heritage' dish of *cuy*, associated with kinship and private consumption, commodifies it and changes the manner of its production. Which food space is more typical? And which is more or less creole or fusion? As this brief journey through the three sites above indicates, there is no authentic local core of Cuencano food, but rather a range of cultural encounters and multiple sites that are variously selected and woven together in the production of *comida típica*. The process of placing these foods into the categories of local and typical, fusion, and/or exogenous threat, is informed by class position and political dynamics and, as I have argued, indicative of broader orientations.

At one level, the food hierarchies and the entanglements of social and culinary stratification, as laid out by Goody in *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (1982), are realized in Cuenca. Those in the very highest positions of Cuencano society, particularly the older generation, continue to occupy the 'white' food spaces of colonial style restaurants. Expatriates, the rural and urban middle classes may publically celebrate 'simple' peasant food and, at times, promote 'Cañari' culinary heritage to the rural lower classes but rarely eat these foods themselves. These social groups all vilify KFC as a symbol of North American cultural imperialism and discursively render the fusionism of fast food invisible, while also celebrating the North American and European grammars of higher-end self-styled 'fusion' restaurants. Meanwhile, the urban lower classes orientate to the United States but do not regard this as compromising their Cuencano-ness, and they draw on the history of colonialism, emulation and *mestizaje* to demonstrate the ways in which Spanish foods have become *comida típica*, as well as highlighting that KFC is just one link in a long chain of cultural encounters. The consumption practices of the rural migrant-peasantry are also orientated towards the United States, although they less readily identify with definitions of foods as Spanish or Cañari but identify 'indigenous' food in the practices of those seemingly less *mestizo* than themselves.

Yet these divergent valuations also show that the Cuencano foodscape is not as structured, fixed or neat as Goody's argument suggests. Rather it is complex, with all the groups discussed defining *comida típica* and valuing its various aspects in different ways. Yet, all, in their own way, indicate the inherent permeability of the category and suggest that the malleability of its definition lies in a long history of encounters and creolization of both people and their food. Currents of cultured and non-cultured, modern and traditional, urban and rural, white and indigenous, Spanish and Cañari and local and global can all be identified in the multiple classifications of foods in Cuenca. In this chapter, I have

attempted to move beyond these crude and simplistic dichotomous constructions, and I hope to have shown that *all* the foods discussed can be regarded as creole and that the recognition of creolization (or lack of) vis-à-vis certain foods is shaped by class relations. The valuations of specific spatio-temporal sites, as indicated through food, provide the foundation of class in Cuenca and, while these relations are structurally informed, they are also not clear-cut, but rather shift across contexts and intersect with generation, ethnicity and urban/rural divides.

The circular flows of people, money, goods, corporations and ideologies are resulting in a renegotiation and contestation of Cuencano class dynamics, and actors of all classes are redefining what it means to be Cuencano and to eat *comida típica*. Being Cuencano – and eating Cuencano – is an intrinsically creole practice; there is neither an authentic local core that incorporates and appropriates the global nor a global that is potentially damaging to the local. Rather Cuencanos are both global and local citizens, navigating the terrains of multiple spatio-temporal sites and selecting, interpreting and weaving together elements in the creation of their own unique subjectivities. Throughout this chapter, I have contended that the variable classification and assessment of a diverse range of foods as ‘local’ and ‘typical’ can thereby be understood as a valuation of different places and times. These places and times could be theoretically defined as ‘external’ or ‘global’, but doing so would perhaps serve to create another false local–global dichotomy. By contrast, I have looked to dissolve these categories. In other words, I have not argued against the notion of a local but am saying that what comprises local differs significantly, is class based and is shaped by the differing spatio-temporal orientations that underpin class relations. Moreover, this process of selecting and combining sites – or creolization – is contested, and in bringing their own site to the fore, actors render those of others invisible, silent and of less value.

Redirecting questions away from how the ‘global’ is domesticated and appropriated by, and blended with, the ‘local’ – moving towards, instead, a model that conceptualizes and acknowledges foods as inherently creole – potentially provides us with new insights into the processes of globalization. The recognition that foods are products of an historical continuum raises new and additional questions regarding the politics and power dynamics of creolization and the extent of its acknowledgement (or not) by certain social actors. Moreover, relating how these processes of culinary valuation both reflect and produce class relations and subjectivities can not only help further illuminate the ways in which subjectivities are produced and performed through

recourse to food but can also deepen our understanding of the ways that 'conflict over cuisine becomes as "a facet of class"' (Goody 1982: 136).

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## Notes

1. See also Bourdieu (1984), Roseberry (1996) and Weismantel (1988), to name just a few examples of work that demonstrate how the consumption of certain foods and food spaces are expressions and constitutive of class and regional affiliations.
2. See, for example, Featherstone (1995) and Hannerz (1987).
3. The average monthly income of the migrant-peasant household with whom I conducted fieldwork is US\$250–400. By contrast, the salary of one of my middle-class, urban participants, who is a school teacher, is US\$150.
4. I have addressed domestic food practices elsewhere. See Abbotts (2009), (2011) and (2012a).
5. See Stutzman (1981) and Whitten (1981) for a detailed discussion of the ways in which the discourse of *mestizaje* promotes an ideology of 'whitening' rather than mixing.
6. See Abbotts (2012b) and (2013) for further discussion.
7. Although originally a theory of production that argued 'the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more of the sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world' (Ritzer 2010: 4), McDonaldization thesis has been applied to seemingly homogenous consumption practices, with any aspects of the contemporary world 'escaping' McDonaldization being either traceable to a 'pre-modern' age or understood as postmodern responses to McDonaldization. The argument suggests that the rationality of McDonalds replaces indigenous and 'authentic' meanings and forms with its own 'McDonalds' sets of values and practices. At one level, it is thereby a thesis of cultural imperialism and global homogenization. See Ritzer (ibid.) for examples.
8. See Abbotts (2012b) for a fuller discussion of the interplay between heritage and fast foods within this social group and Abbotts (2011) for an account of the role of *cuy* in a transnational, migratory context.
9. I examine the obvious ironies and contradictions of a social group seeking an alternative, 'simple' life, consuming 'industrial' and 'exogenous' foods and dining in 'fine restaurants' (Abbotts 2013, 2014).

10. A form of pumpkin/ squash.
11. See Abbots (2014) for further discussion of the politics of the *Chola Cuencana* image and the role she plays in country – city relations. See also Weismantel (2001; 2003).

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# 6

## The High and the Low in the Making of a Portuguese National Cuisine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

*José Manuel Sobral*

### Introduction: cuisine and national identity

The sphere of food and cuisine is one area that reflects the major contrast Goody establishes between Eurasia and Black Africa of pre-colonial times (Goody 1982: 98). In Goody's view, unlike Sub-Saharan Africa, Eurasia has long been deeply stratified in terms of social position and culture between the *high* and the *low*: the upper classes or castes versus the lower ones and haute cuisine versus the fare of commoners. Haute cuisine has always been a reserved area for elites – in the quantity and diversity of the ingredients used, in its exotic components and in the complexity of preparation. Though not devoid of creativity, the food of the majority was dominated by cheaper and locally available foodstuffs.

Among the factors that contributed to differentiation in cuisine, he signalled the employment of writing (Goody 1982: 99). Writing became a structural part of Eurasia from the Bronze Age, linked to intensive agriculture, the state, the religions of the book, science and a differentiated cuisine. In fact, the first cuisine recipes were found in Mesopotamia (Goody 1977: 138–139). In Goody's opinion,

... the recipe has important implications for the extension and differentiation of the repertoires of cooking that accompanied the differentiation of culture and society associated with the technological developments of the Bronze Age, when cooking took on a more specific "class" aspect. Equally, the elaborateness of the modern cuisine depends essentially upon the literacy of its practitioners.

(Goody 1982: 139–140)

Haute cuisine, supported by written recipes and cookbooks, has historically been a marker of status of the upper classes. 'Low' cuisine, on the other hand, the cuisine of the peasantry, transmitted orally by practice or observation, would be celebrated much later. In many cases, this started only in the nineteenth century, when popular cultural practices were celebrated as markers of national identity. According to Anderson, print capitalism was a main factor in the imagination of the nation (Anderson 1986: 46). Cookbooks, which multiplied from the nineteenth century on – along with the press – were important tools in making cuisine a signifier for national identity. In constructing national cuisine, authors of cookbooks assembled recipes both from high and low cooking, with different histories, constructing what was aptly named a 'holistic artefact' (Mintz 1996: 104). And, if this endured, it was because writing afforded the possibility of learning and reproducing a corpus of recipes that transcended any particular place or region for being of the nation.

Portuguese cuisine was recently extolled (2000) by a government decree, which established its relationship with the nation's identity in the following terms:

It is now indisputable that the cultural identity of peoples, along with tangible goods...also includes a vast intangible heritage... Understood as the result of traditional knowledge that attests to the social evolution of the Portuguese people, national cuisine [gastronomy] is part of an intangible heritage that needs to be safeguarded and promoted.<sup>1</sup>

This resolution is part of a broader dynamic that goes well beyond the Portuguese case. The construction of a nation's heritage is an old process, predating even the passion devoted to what were considered 'national antiques' in the time of romantic nationalism. This process has reached a climax today with the global activity of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which seeks to regulate the building of world heritage (Lowenthal 1998). 'Culinary traditions' are a recent addition to the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. The French government, with an eye to the symbolic – as marker of national identity – and economic value of its country's cuisine, had a pioneering role (as should be expected). 'Foie gras' was declared part of the 'cultural and gastronomic patrimony of France' in 2005 (DeSoucey 2010: 444) and the 'repas gastronomique des français' inscribed as world heritage in 2010.<sup>2</sup> We can trace the roots of this

process to the nineteenth century, when cuisine was deemed to be an art and gastronomy was given intellectual status as a specific form of knowledge (Ferguson 2004: 49–92; Drouard 2007: 263–268).

As elsewhere in the affluent areas of the world, culinary offerings available in Portugal today are marked by a diversity that ranges from fast food to sushi. However, at the same time, there is a strong appreciation of Portuguese cuisine, which also mirrors the preference for local cuisine in other places (see, e.g., Clark, this volume; Watson, this volume). This is in accordance with the view that insists that two trends seem to mark contemporary attitudes towards food and cuisine: one of delocalization and cosmopolitanism that is linked to globalization and the industrial production of basic products and recipes and another that emphasizes the rootedness of food and cuisine (Poulain 2005: 19–29).

Cuisine is a product of the broader dynamics that shape it. It is a powerful marker of identity. In this chapter, I seek to show that Portuguese national cuisine is a construction and a product of history that is of relatively recent origin. The analysis seeks to understand the Portuguese case in a comparative perspective. The privileged sources in this study are textual: menus, novels and cookbooks. Jack Goody's work *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* and specially the emphasis he placed, in this book, on the implications of writing, class and cultural differentiation as well as on the need of an historical and comparative perspective are the main inspiration in this endeavour.

### **Haute cuisine and class: the table of the dominant**

Four sets of menus are considered here: two collected by individuals of the upper class – bourgeoisie – one coming from a family of the high aristocracy and another from the royal family. The analysis of menus collected by two important members of the Portuguese literary elite – writers Ramalho Ortigão and Malheiro Dias – allows key characteristics of the food consumed by the more powerful groups in Portugal to be highlighted. There are important factors to take into consideration, however, before we examine these menus. First, the very fact that they are collectors' items is indicative of the importance of these meals in the social life of that period. Second, the collector's identity provides valuable insight into the society of the time, both in terms of stratification and culture and ideology. In other words, they tell us what, in specific situations, members of the ruling classes eat and their reasons for doing so. These meals can be seen as being indicative of their culinary and social identities. For Goody, the menu represents the valuation of the

written over the oral and is at the same time a symbol of luxury and choice, appropriated to formal occasions, the non-domestic meal, when the main role in cooking is done by men and not by women (Goody 1977: 134).

The oldest of our interlocutors is Ramalho Ortigão, one of the most important Portuguese writers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Ramalho frequented the circles of the aristocracy, the royal family, the gentry and the upper-middle class. His collection consists of 67 menus, ranging from 1855 to 1909. French influence is a constant presence, which can be detected immediately in the name of the item itself – the menu. The language used for the majority of the items is French, as only three are written in Portuguese. Its structure (*hors d'oeuvres*, *relevées*, *entrées*, *légumes*, *rôti*, *entremets*, *dessert*), indicative of the diversification of eating practices in the nineteenth century (Flandrin 2002: 144), is of French origin. There are multiple references to the products, recipes and dishes of French haute cuisine: *truffles*, *asperges*, *mayonnaise*, *aspic*, *galantines*, *foie gras*, *consommé*, *hommard*, *perdreaux à la Périgueux* (expensive foodstuffs and complex dishes only available to a privileged minority of consumers and thereby symbols of power). There are other national allusions, such as *salade russe*, *filets de sole à l'anglaise*, *hollandaise sauce*, which are typical of French haute cuisine. With the exception of the contents of the three menus written in Portuguese, there are only a total of nine references to Portuguese items in all of the menus.<sup>3</sup> Portuguese wines do not even compete with their French counterparts. In fact, only fortified wines enshrined in international consumption, such as Port and Madeira (or in the case of Spain, Sherry), make an appearance. The wines preferred by these diners, not to mention champagne, are those from France.

Consumption of such food and drink was typical of the Portuguese nobility, grand bourgeoisie and the literary and political elite. This was the kind of food served in places such as the Braganza Hotel – in some way, the Lisbon equivalent of London's Savoy – and the Royal Palaces of Sintra and the Castle of Pena also in Sintra.<sup>4</sup>

The French influence in international cuisine predates this period as there were French cooks working in Portugal before the nineteenth century. France was already a reference for Portugal as being a centre of the 'civilization of manners' (Elias 1973 [1939]) and a source of culinary inspiration (Ferguson 2004: 36–47; Pereira 2000: 55–75). However, in Portugal as elsewhere, this influence becomes even stronger in the nineteenth century. Even some mayors, or a Lisbon mayor, at least, followed suit. We can see this tendency in a menu from 1895 commemorating the

centennial birthday of St. Anthony of Lisbon – more widely known as St. Anthony of Padua, though he was born in Lisbon. The menu is written in French, the meal's service [order] is *à la russe*, and the dishes are French: *potage*, *galantines truffées*, *punch au kirsch*, *hors d'oeuvres* and so forth. Only the wines are Portuguese. (This contrasts with current practice, as the Saint's birthday is commemorated with vernacular dishes – such as grilled sardines – that are cooked and served in the street or in restaurants.) The more affluent middle class followed the example set by the royalty, as seen in a menu from an 1889 Legal Congress that brought together Portuguese barristers in Lisbon.<sup>5</sup>

An example of how cuisine operates as a means of social differentiation can be seen in the collection's only menu in Spanish, which documents a lunch given by the Spanish Queen to 25 paupers on Good Friday in 1893. Here, we find halibut, fried hake, breaded sardines, sole, cod – remember that Good Friday is a fasting day for Catholics – local (Spanish) cheese, olives, oranges, almonds and so forth. As is appropriate for a meal offered to the needy in Spain, French is not used and French dishes are not featured. The poor have a national menu, written in the national language. Remember that, according to Stephen Mennell, class and nationality have been the two most powerful influences on people's food preferences throughout the history of Europe, with class prevailing; these menus are a powerful reminder of this (Mennell 1996: 17). These menus also show that there is an intimate connection between social position and the (national) language used in them, as observed in English menus: '(...) the inclusion of the foreign at the expense of the local is typical of the language of this and most high-status English menus, with their frequent recourse to restaurant French' (Goody 1977: 133).

Analysis of the menus collected by Malheiro Dias – also an influential writer and journalist – echoes what was said above. The collection includes 72 menus written between 1898 and 1934, referring to meals in Portugal, Brazil and Spain. The overwhelming majority of the menus are written in French, while only two are in Portuguese (and one in Spanish). Even those menus describing meals in Portugal are written in French. The primacy of French haute cuisine can be seen in the menu ('*Menu du Dejeuner du 31 Mai 1903*') of a lunch offered at the Palace of Francisco Barahona, in Évora, the main town of the Alentejo region, to honour the King's visit.<sup>6</sup> Barahona was an aristocrat and powerful landowner in the Alentejo region. The menu is written in French and the cuisine is French. This example is entirely the opposite of current practice. The cuisine of the Alentejo, which is a variation of the so-called

Mediterranean diet, is represented as one of the most prestigious and deemed 'authentic' in Portugal. The city of Évora, also classified as a world heritage site, has become widely known in the country and abroad for its restaurants that specialize in the regional cuisine of the Alentejo.

French cuisine also features prominently in the menus of the Dukes of Palmela, members of the Portuguese top aristocracy. The first duke was a liberal prime minister acquainted with the European high society. His family became one of the greater landowners of the country and owned several country estates and two palaces in Lisbon. This collection offers us an excellent view of what they ingested between 1875 and 1966.<sup>7</sup>

This is not a systematic archive, but a collection of menus relating to formal occasions mainly in their residences – and for some years the daily home menus for lunch and dinner (1929: 130; 1931; 1932).<sup>8</sup> Some of these events can be compared to royal ones, as in the commemoration of the anniversary of the duke's daughter in 1882, with assembled 500 guests and produced under the supervision of their French chef at the time. The food was French and some of the most luxurious French wines were served: *Chateau Lafite*, *Chateau Margaux* and *Chateau d'Yquem*.<sup>9</sup>

French menus for formal occasions appeared until the late 1940s, although from the beginning of this decade menus for ceremonial events like family marriages were already written in Portuguese. The food served combined Portuguese dishes – or dishes claimed to be so – with international ones, bearing the mark of French high cuisine. The daily menus for the years from 1928 to 1932 also have a very interesting characteristic. While those for adults are written in French or using both languages, those designed for two children are in Portuguese. Note that the language used in the menu does not mean that the dishes are from the same origin; hence, for example, Portuguese dishes can be translated into French. The dishes are varied, with Portuguese ones present.

In conclusion, formality and social hierarchy are attached to French cuisine. The daily ones are much simplified and offer a mixed or a hybrid cuisine, still full of French connotations. The rising presence of the Portuguese, both in the dishes and in the language of the menus, is in parallel to the rise of nationalism in Portugal and abroad. In the 1940s, even formal menus – of marriages – were written in Portuguese. This was the time of nationalist *Estado Novo* [New State] (1933–1974), and the duke was an ambassador. In fact, the last menu, from 1966 – and one of the few related to meals taken outside – is particularly revelatory of the food ideology of the regime. It refers to a lunch offered by the Portuguese nationalist dictator, Salazar. It is written in Portuguese, featuring only food claimed to be Portuguese and Portuguese wines.<sup>10</sup>

The menus coming from the royal family – for example, since 1880 until 1910, when the monarchy was abolished – like the above deposited in the national archives confirm the correlation between social position (class) and types of cuisine.<sup>11</sup> Although they would have daily menus written in Portuguese, on more formal occasions not just French language but also French cuisine tends to be mandatory. Of course, sometimes the name did not mean that the recipe had the same origin of the language employed. But on the more solemn meals, this was recurrent – for example, the menu of a dinner commemorating a major colonial expedition in Mozambique in 1895 was written in French with French food (Dinner Menu 21 January 1896). As the royals travelled abroad, some menus written in French they recollect from meals eaten in places like Biarritz, Sorrento, Naples and Budapest are a testimony of the links between French haute cuisine and upper class cosmopolitanism – even if some meals feature local dishes written in French. There is even a list in French of several hundred dishes in use in the royal cuisines.<sup>12</sup> And while the royals and people who come to share their table everyday – court dignitaries, members of the aristocracy, ladies-in-waiting, officers of the guard or the royal physician – consumed dishes where French haute cuisine is present, their most close servants – chambermaids, valets – almost exclusively ate Portuguese dishes, albeit very rich. To that extent, it is possible to say they consumed Portuguese high cuisine.<sup>13</sup>

At this time, we also find a similar influence of French haute cuisine in Brazil. In Spain, it remained influential among the upper classes from the time of the monarchy (Llopis 1998 [1989]: 345–348; Del Corral 2000: 149–151) to the Republic (1931) (Iturbe and Letamendia 2000: 62). This was the also case in Belgium until the first decade of the twentieth century (Scholliers 2002) and in official banquets in Italy (Camporesi 1993: 140), despite the fact of Italy being another prestigious centre of culinary dissemination. Outside Continental Europe, French haute cuisine enjoyed a most prestigious position among the upper classes in nineteenth-century England – and Britain – North America (Mennell 1996: 134–165; Trubek 2000: 59–63; Shore 2007: 309–316) and Mexico, where at the 1910 celebration marking 100 years of independence not a single Mexican dish was served (Pilcher 1998: 62–65, 153). In Japan, French food was part of the radical process of economic and social transformation that occurred beginning with the demise of the Shogunate and the Meiji Restoration (1868). Here, French haute cuisine was the most prestigious, served in luxury hotels and at elite banquets (Cwiertka 2006: 13–14, 41). In all these countries, French haute cuisine was part

of a cosmopolitan lifestyle that differentiated socially and symbolically (Bourdieu 1979) the classes that could afford its consumption.

Jack Goody has applied Robert Redfield's well-known opposition between 'little' and 'great' tradition to the study of cooking, adding social stratification to it. 'Grand Bourgeoisie, Great Tradition, these are partners in luxury cultures', he stressed (Goody 1998: 196). In Portugal, while the majority consumed a vernacular cuisine made by women, orally transmitted, the elites, at least on important occasions, identified themselves with an imported haute cuisine, predominantly of French origin. The product of male chefs, some of whom were foreign, ensured its pre-eminence in social terms. Elites have always used food as a marker of social superiority, from ancient Greece, Rome or China to modern Western societies (Anderson 2005: 136).

It should be emphasized again that the menus analysed correspond to meals eaten by the ruling classes. They do not reflect what the vast majority ate at that time, and in any case other records show that they cannot stand as an accurate picture of *all* food consumption by the elite. The menus alluded to mainly refer to exceptional, solemn events – apart from those connected to the daily table of the royal family or immensely rich aristocrats, like the Dukes of Palmela – thus they should not be taken as an accurate portrayal of everyday consumption. However, the fact that this was food deemed appropriate for such occasions is an infallible sign of its desirability and elite status.

## Elements of continuity in cooking in Portugal

As already noted, vernacular culinary traditions existed at this time in Portugal. These compare to the general characteristics of the cuisine of southern Europe (Albala 2000: 1203–1210), with structural elements of 'longue durée' – such as the importance of bread, vegetable soups, fruit, rice (for those who could afford it), wine, pork and inexpensive fish like sardines or salted, dried cod. Due to the role of Portugal in the worldwide trade of sugar and spices, these commodities have had a traditional presence in Portuguese cuisine. In addition, New World foodstuffs – corn, tomatoes, beans, turkey – had an early impact on the country's cuisine, although potatoes only became popular during the second half of the nineteenth century (Oliveira-Marques 1974; Ferro 1996: 15–69; Arnaut 2000; Braga 2000; 2002; Castelo-Branco n.d.; Cascudo 2004). Consumption, therefore, was not uniform since diets tended to vary according to the class position of the consumer (Ferro 1996: 15–38; Cruz 1843: 383) and in terms of region (Ferro 1996: 17; S. Romão 1841). Cuisine

is recorded in a limited number of surviving cookbooks or even scarcer manuscripts. The texts were generally the property of members of the nobility or gentry, or the higher layers of the middle class. Although the influence of the texts was curtailed by their limited availability, they are still relevant to understanding some structural dimensions of taste formation, culinary habitus and the historical continuities of Portuguese cuisine. In fact, some continuity throughout the centuries can be seen in the texts.

But before proceeding with the analysis, it should be noted that cookbooks are used here mainly for the purpose of studying the construction of a Portuguese cuisine. Hence, they are seen as representations of food and cuisine that can have a closer or more distant relation to the real practices of cuisine (Claflin 2013). The distance between the contents of cookbooks and real culinary practices must be stressed. The books need to be submitted to interpretation and contextualization in order to detect in their pages the traces of poverty and undernourishment, as in recipes for a nettle broth or of wild purslanes. As has been stressed with reference to regional cookery books, these have an over-representation of dishes for festive occasions; hence they do not reflect the real everyday diet (Mennell 1996: 217–220). This must be kept in mind when reading these books.

This cautionary note applies to all of them. In addition to their meaning, as representations, cookbooks are also intended to perform some kind of achievement (Claflin 2013). Their use for the present analysis concentrates both on their meanings – what they can teach us about the mindset of their authors or the expectations of the intended audience – and on what they are intended to achieve. So, many other important features of the genre – like their detailed evolution, the contents beside recipes, such as those linked to health and dietetic prescriptions, the management of food and cuisine – are beyond the scope of this chapter. Here, however, attention is also paid to their authorship (Claflin 2013). The vast majority are men, many of them professional cooks. And, apart from the manuscript notes attributed to D. Maria, women will only reappear much, much later. This says a lot about their authors, their intended readers and the type of cuisine they represent. According to Goody in the great courts of stratified societies, as in the Mediterranean and in Europe since Egyptian times, men are employed as cooks (Goody 1982: 101). It is still they who dominate the new restaurants of the nineteenth century in Portugal and abroad. They are also the gastronomes that author some of the cookbooks to be mentioned. Women, responsible for home cooking, only make their appearance at the beginning

of the twentieth century. This can be seen both as indicative of their prospective audiences – other women from the middle classes – and as of their empowerment as literate people.

The first cookbook is not really a book, but the sixteenth-century manuscript known as *Livro de Cozinha da Infanta D. Maria* [The Cooking Book of Infanta Mary]. The second is the first printed cookbook, dating from the late-seventeenth century, *A Arte da Cozinha* [The Art of Cookery] by royal cook Domingos Rodrigues (1st edition, 1680), while the third is an important manuscript dated 1715. There is agreement between their content and the information provided by some very generic historical studies of Portuguese food and cuisine (Castelo-Branco n.d.; Cascudo 2004).

Indeed, it is possible to detect recipes still in use today from an examination of the codex from the sixteenth century, which is prior to the Portuguese incorporation of foods from the Americas, although there have been many changes, sometimes radical ones, in the preparation of foods with the same name: black pudding, meatballs, Moorish chicken, blancmange, marzipan, *marmelada* (quince jam), sponge cake and so on. Other elements that appear familiar to us include the importance of sautéed onions as the base for several dishes and the use of spices and herbs such as garlic, cilantro (coriander) and mint. These ingredients are common in the cookbook of Rodrigues. Among the dishes of this late one, we find a predecessor to what is now commonly known as *Cozido à Portuguesa* [Portuguese stew], which is a stew of cheaper cuts of beef, pork, sometimes chicken, smoked and blood sausages, vegetables, rice and potatoes. It is a dish with peasant origins that closely resembles the *cocidos* of Spain or the French *pot-au-feu*. We also find at this time *escabeche* – from the arabo-persian *sikbâg* and the Catalan *escabetx*<sup>14</sup> – which is a popular sauce made by mixing olive oil and vinegar, in addition to its being a means of preserving food in Iberian cuisines. Or *vinha-de-alhos*, meat preserved in wine and garlic (which is at the origin of India's *vindaloo*). In desserts, the use of flour, eggs and sugar prevailed.

The manuscript of Borges Henriques (1715) is an exceptional document.<sup>15</sup> Penned by someone from an affluent middle-class background, it reveals a greater presence of foodstuffs and recipes we still identify as Portuguese cuisine. Sardines, an inexpensive, hugely popular food staple traditionally served with bread and then roasted in the open air and sold in the streets of Lisbon, occupy a place of honour. The same goes for dried and salted cod, which has been considered a symbol of Portuguese national identity for a long time.

It stands in stark contrast with the work of the French chef Lucas Rigaud, who cooked for the Portuguese aristocracy at the end of the eighteenth century, and the author of *O Cozinheiro Moderno ou Nova Arte da Cozinha* [The Modern Cook or the New Art of Cooking...] (1999 [1785]), a work that naturally reveals a significant French influence.

It is possible to cite passages from other texts that speak to the presence of a Portuguese cuisine, but I will only consider one additional well-known example *A Arte do Cozinheiro e do Copeiro*... [The Art of the Cook and Butler...] (1841), written by a provincial nobleman. It is largely a translation of the book not only about cuisine but also on the domestic economy written by a Frenchwoman, Mme Aglaé Adanson.<sup>16</sup> It references foreign cuisine, mainly French, but the translator has added a large number of Portuguese recipes, including a few of cod, still in use today. Moreover, the taste of salt cod is explicitly praised (S. Romão 1841: 106). Some of these dishes would go on to become very popular in urban Portugal – as in French cafés – like steak accompanied by French fries. But, most importantly, in the final pages the author delineates a kind of geography of the food habits of ‘the poor and ordinary people of this kingdom’ – that is, the peasantry – revealing significant regional differences. Bread is the main staple all over the country, but the cereals of which it is made vary significantly. Corn bread is used in the north-west, while in the north-east bread is made from rye; in Algarve it is wheat that is used and in the centre of the country they mix it. In the northern mountains, from November to March, the poor do not even have bread at their disposal and eat chestnuts instead. They eat bread soups and porridges flavoured with garlic and olive oil in several regions, or pork fat (S. Romão 1841: 289–291).<sup>17</sup> Besides its social meaning, this is a powerful reminder that national cuisines are made of ‘...an aggregation of foods, styles, cooking methods and signature dishes from the regional cuisines’ (Mintz 1996: 97). Only later would these regional cuisines be codified and constructed as parts of a comprehensive Portuguese cuisine.

### **The fight against denationalization and the exaltation of Portuguese cuisine**

The most famous cookbooks published in Portugal during the second half of the nineteenth century reflect the supremacy of international, mainly French haute cuisine. One is *O Cozinheiro dos Cozinhos* [The Cook of Cooks], first published in 1870. It is a work that features the

cuisine we have seen in the menus I described previously, not only reflecting a preference for an international cuisine dominated by French dishes but also including some of Italian, German and British origin. The recipes call for expensive and symbolic products, such as truffles. All the cheeses mentioned in the book are foreign. Regarding the wines, we find a predominance of famous French labels. The only Portuguese wine mentioned is Madeira. The book even recommends using olive oil from Southern France.

From the same period (1876) and of similar orientation is *A Arte da Cozinha* [The Culinary Art], authored by the renowned chef João da Mata. The preface revealingly praises da Mata: 'He has made of Lisbon the culinary miniature of Paris'. There is a similar attitude in a 1929 cookbook authored by two women from the upper-middle class that features Portuguese recipes but states: 'in Portugal, as in all civilized lands, French cuisine occupies a preeminent position' (Alinanda 1929: 13). However, this hegemony was already being challenged and its days were numbered.

One of the first advocates of Portuguese cuisine was Garrett (Tavares 1999), a writer and politician inspired by romantic nationalism. Garrett dedicated himself to the creation of a national art in theatre and literature and researched oral folk traditions that were seen as possessing a genuine national identity. His praise of the Portuguese cuisine is an element of his nationalist creed. We find a similar attitude in another very popular novelist, Júlio Dinis. In his hugely successful *As Pupilas do Senhor Reitor* [The Dean's Pupils] (1866), he praises a rural physician, who was tired of 'culinary Gallicisms' and who claimed that Portuguese cuisine was the best in the world (Cascudo 2004: 330). Similar attitudes can be found in the work of the famous novelist Eça de Queiroz, who lived a cosmopolitan life as a consul in Havana, Newcastle and Paris, where he died. He married into the high aristocracy. In spite of knowing French haute cuisine very well – it appears frequently in his novels (Goes 2004) – he glorifies Portuguese cuisine. We can see an example of this in his 1901 novel *A Cidade e as Serras* [The City and the Mountains], in the irony with which he juxtaposes living in 'civilized' Paris and in the Portuguese countryside. Food symbolically expresses the contrast between urban boredom and rural vitality. Dishes presented as Parisian, such as 'fillet of deer, steeped in sherry' or 'oranges in ether', are unfavourably compared with homemade food like chicken broth or roast chicken. Here can be seen the triumph of local, Portuguese cuisine over the food consumed in the Champs Élysées (Eça de Queiroz 1992 [1901]).

At the close of the nineteenth century, another famous Portuguese writer, Fialho de Almeida, stated the following:

The denationalization of a cuisine is for me, perhaps, the first signal of the demise of a people (...) the ethnic cohesion of a race being revealed primarily through three things: literature, history and food. Novels and poems give people their lyrical and emotional character, history gives them their heroic character, and finally national dishes give them their physical nature – this one, as you know, supports the other two.

(Fialho de Almeida, 1992 [1889–94]: 218)

Of course, Fialho was a conspicuous supporter of Portuguese cuisine (Goes 2006). Fialho makes these considerations in a satirical tone. However, the establishment of a link between elements recognized as bearing the essence of nationality – literature, history and cuisine – is illustrative. It is also no coincidence that this arises in a context of nationalist exaltation – with the imperialist, totalitarian and racist tendencies that would become so widely influential in the next century (Hayes 1963 [1941]: 196–285). And in Portugal, as in neighbouring Spain, this context was experienced as one of decadence. At the end of the nineteenth century the Portuguese state had little influence in world affairs and offered a gloomy contrast, in the nationalist imagination, to the former glories of the so-called Golden Age of the Discoveries in the sixteenth century. If we take this into account, we can fully understand the meaning of expressions like ‘the demise of a people’.

In this context, we can identify the impact in cookbooks of this resurgent nationalism. The 1905 reissue of *The Cook of Cooks* maintains the repertoire of international cookery dominated by French haute cuisine. But it introduced significant changes not found in the first edition of 1870. The author explicitly states in the preface to the new edition that he has collected recipes ‘especially following the traditions of the Portuguese cuisine’ – although, in spite of this claim, only a few are connected to vernacular cuisine. Portuguese olive oil is praised now (Plantier 1905: 652), but the presence of Portuguese wines is still very restricted. Although salt cod had been for centuries a very popular staple and was already perceived at the time as a marker of Portuguese identity, the book states a preference for fresh cod. Cod is under-represented in the recipes anyway, in stark contrast to its presence both in the diet of the population and in ‘popular representations’ in cheap popular literature, images and comedy.<sup>18</sup>

This is a very special book, addressed not only to the 'good housewives', as he states, but also to the male members of the 'gastronomic field', this being 'a social universe in which all participants are at once producers and consumers caught in a complex web of social, political, economic, and cultural relations that they have woven and continue to wove' (Ferguson 2004: 104).<sup>19</sup> Gastronomes claimed the monopoly of the definition of the norm in terms of taste in matters of food and cuisine. There is an important section at the end that features recipes invented and executed by some of these, 'distinguished artists and Portuguese intellectuals'. Among them are found some members of the aristocracy, famous writers – including the above-mentioned Fialho d' Almeida – high-ranking civil servants, journalists. This is, indeed, a group of well-known and influential people. So, it can be interpreted as a vehicle for the prescription of culinary norms for high-life society.

Hence, class stratification is clearly detected in these cookbooks. It can be seen at work in a cookbook intended to 'be used in the kitchens of the poor and almost poor' (Carneiro 1901). It stands in a stark contrast with *The Cook of Cooks*. There are no luxury ingredients of foreign origin or preparation techniques with French names but instead are recipes of dishes that we would still find in homes or more modest restaurants in Portugal. And although here are dishes that are undoubtedly part of Portuguese culinary traditions, there is no nationalist intent or promotion of a national cuisine (Ferro 1996: 56). The primary concerns are social in nature, that is to say, proposing dishes accessible to those who could not afford haute cuisine. All the same, the emblematic salt cod figures in 22 recipes. By contrast, the same editor boasts in another book published at the same time (1905) but intended for a more affluent audience, as containing recipes of the 'good... teachers of Portuguese, Spanish, French, English, Italian and German cuisines'. This bears testimony to the link between social classes, cuisine and nationality (and cosmopolitanism). For those whom he deemed 'poor', the editor recommends the national cuisine, while those represented as 'rich' can enjoy more international fare (Queiroz 1905). As stressed by Goody: 'In terms of class and cuisine, the higher in the hierarchy, the wider the contacts, the broader the view. Thus the higher cuisine inevitably had to acquire ingredients from "outside"' (Goody 1982: 105; though see Abbots, this volume).

The early twentieth century also saw the appearance of a book that represents a turning point towards the consecration of a Portuguese cuisine, *O Tratado Completo da Cozinha e Copa* [The Complete Treaty of the Kitchen and Pantry] (1904). In this encyclopaedic work, international

recipes and French haute cuisine still figure, but there is also a strong Portuguese presence. More fundamental is that for the first time the places and regions where the recipes were collected are identified. But there is no claim for or conscious defence of a Portuguese national cuisine, even though a staple such as salt cod is present in 26 recipes. That is found in an anonymous book – for ‘ladies’ – entitled *Cozinha Portuguesa ou Arte Culinária Nacional* (Portuguese Cuisine or the National Culinary Art) (1902). In it, this cuisine is defined both in terms of a heritage coming from the ancestors – as ‘that of our grandparents’ – and of its intrinsic qualities. It is ‘simple, substantial and good’ – unlike the French – and it is considered a sign of patriotism to defend it. Salt cod figures in 37 preparations.

Consecration would be definitive in a book from 1936 that casts itself as a summary of Portuguese national cuisine, *Culinária Portuguesa* [Portuguese Culinary Practices] by António Maria de Oliveira-Bello (Olleboma). Well worth noting is that the author, a great industrialist, was a member of the group that regularly consumed French haute cuisine. In fact, six years before its release, he published another cookbook that features the ‘teaching of French cuisine, which is the most perfect, the most artistic and hygienic’ (Quitério 1994: 8). In the new text, he went in a novel direction: the codification and promotion of national recipes, many described as regional and colonial; as it is widely known, Portugal was a colonial power until 1975, and the colonies were considered to be an integral part of the nation. Salt cod is present in 46 recipes.

This discussion is not intended to evaluate the authenticity or so-called Portuguese character of these recipes. As mentioned above, there is a profound difference, in terms of class and region, as to what is produced and consumed. Moreover, no national cuisine can evolve separately. As has been stated, ‘national cuisines are never entirely national’ (Fernandez-Armesto 2001: 155). Portuguese cuisine is extraordinarily differentiated in terms of region (Davidson and Pensado 1992; Davidson 2002) and of social class; besides studies that began to be undertaken in the last quarter of the nineteenth century underlined the monotony and severe nutritional insufficiencies in the diets (most notoriously the absence of animal protein) of the majority of the population (Mendes-Corrêa 1951: 31–77). Also, it has always been open to imports and features dishes in common with other cuisines, in particular those of the Iberian Peninsula.

National cuisines are not constructed in isolation; instead they are the product of interaction and of the circulation of ideas and commodities,

and this applies both to national cuisines such as those invented in the nineteenth century and those that are of more recent origin, like the Belizean one (Wilk 2002; 2006). In this construction, a major role was played by cookbook authors, coming from the upper or the cultivated middle classes.

### **Nationalism and the making of a Portuguese (national) cuisine**

In order to fully understand the meaning of Oliveira-Bello's text, the context of the period when it was written and published must be taken into consideration. This was the beginning of Salazar's Estado Novo [New State], the authoritarian nationalist regime with fascist leanings that ruled Portugal from 1933 until 1974.

The limitations of space mean that only a sketch rather than an adequate genealogy (in the Foucauldian sense of the term [1975]) of the construction of a Portuguese national cuisine such as expressed in Oliveira-Bello's book can be developed here. The nationalism of the late-nineteenth century, which pervaded the political, artistic and scientific life of the time, is the true ancestor to the triumphant nationalism of the Estado Novo (Lopes 1973; Ramos 1994; Torgal, Mendes and Catroga I, 1998: 101–310; II, 1998; Leal 2000; Sobral 2003). The first allusions to the fight against denationalization of cooking and a defence of Portuguese cuisine coincides with the universal triumph of French haute cuisine and is at the same time a reaction against it. Indeed, the very fact that French cuisine was seen as an 'elite standard', 'the most successful melding of national image and cuisine in the minds of outsiders' (Smith 2012: 451) seems to have played a role in achieving the same for Portugal. For Guy, who manly devotes her attention to France, in this very moment of heightened concurrence between State powers, nationalism then confers to food a moral and imperial dimension (Guy 2012: 191). This was a time marked both by the development of capitalism, industrial and agrarian, of adoption of economic nationalism – mainly for protecting cereal production – and of cultural and political nationalism. Then developed a wider interest in Portuguese ethnography that mainly focused on rural culture – peasants were seen as the mainstay of national traditions – and in history. This period was marked by great nationalist commemorative ceremonies, like the third centennials of the death of Camões (1880) – the author of 'national' epic poem '*Os Lusíadas*' [The Lusiads]– or of the arrival of da Gama in India (1898). There was precisely this celebration of the so-called Age of Discoveries,

the Golden Age of the Portuguese national(ist) narrative, enshrined in these festivities as in basic schooling or the popular press, both developing at the time (Sobral 2003). All this was in common with what was happening in other countries, where nationalism was rising in its various dimensions. These processes have been called the 'nationalization of the masses', the effort for disseminating among the common people a nationalist world view that would lie behind the ascension of aggressive nationalisms in the twentieth century (Mosse 1975).<sup>20</sup> In Portugal, this was also the time of struggle for Empire in Africa, in competition with more powerful states like Britain, France and Spain. What happens in matters related to the construction of a Portuguese national cuisine is only fully understood if we take both the internal and the external contexts into consideration.

The New State (1933–1974) was in some significant ways a continuation of late nineteenth-century nationalism. In economic terms, this was a regime bent on protectionist and anti-liberal policies favouring both agricultural production and industry. It also claimed to pursue the aim of a national, political and cultural revival. Its conception of the nation also included colonial Empire as its possession. The countryside and the peasants remained the focus of the representation of the national essences. It reproduced nationalist rituals in multitudinous public events, like the Portuguese World exhibit of 1940, designed to celebrate the centennial of the foundation of the Kingdom of Portugal (1140) and the Restoration of its independence from the dual monarchy it formed under the Spanish Habsburgs (1640). It differentiated from other and earlier nationalist programmes in being anti-liberal, drawing its inspiration from authoritarian regimes like Italian fascism and from Catholic conservatism on the rise in the interwar period. The New State [Estado Novo] pursued an active policy of nationalization of culture, and what happens in the culinary sphere – undoubtedly a minor preoccupation for State policy – must be interpreted in this light.

Nationalist concerns in Portugal, as elsewhere, caused the government to promote some selected components of 'folk culture', such as vernacular architecture, music, dance, arts and crafts (Melo 2001), at least up to a certain point. Moreover, these concerns fuelled the development of a new economic activity – tourism – around the landscapes, monuments, arts and cuisine encoded as 'national' and 'regional'. The prototype of this policy was implemented vis-à-vis a state-sponsored network of hotel establishments that date from the 1940s, the *Pousadas de Portugal* [the Inns of Portugal]. These were intended to display regional differences in architecture and décor and serve local cuisine (Melo 2001: 250–258).

Hence, Oliveira-Bello's work gains its meaning only when assessed in the context of the nationalist struggle to (re)build or 'nationalize' the nation – and the role of the cookbook in promoting culinary nationalization in Portugal can be compared to others, like Artusi's cookbook in post-Risorgimento Italy.<sup>21</sup> The author was a supporter of the regime and a member of one of the classes – the grand bourgeoisie – that guaranteed its financial and political backing. As already discussed, Portuguese cuisine was even considered to be a marker of national identity, before the *Estado Novo* [New State]. Now the time had come to 'nationalize' Portuguese cuisine under the auspices of the State by individuals who shared its concerns and beliefs. Oliveira-Bello was a founder and president of the Portuguese Society of Gastronomy, which sought to '(...)highlight national cuisine, improve her, giving her the place she deserves', and to encourage a local cuisine in every region (Sampaio in Oliveira-Bello 1936: 8–9). He was also in a privileged class position that afforded him the opportunity of knowing both the products of higher cuisine and of the regional and even peasant one, the high and the low he conjoined to make the 'Portuguese cuisine'.

Oliveira-Bello's attitude was in tune with what was taking place in Portugal and abroad (Mennell 1996: 274–277). According to Pilcher, there was a loss of interest in Francophile cuisine after the First World War, followed by an interwar affirmation of local and national cuisines made along nationalist lines (Pilcher 2006: 67). There was also renewed attention dedicated to provincial cuisine in France (Ferguson 2004: 121–133; Rauch 2008) and Fascist Italy (Helstosky 2004: 86–87; Montanari 2010), a tendency that was linked to the development of tourism infrastructure in both countries (Csargo 1996: 835–836; Drouard 2007: 287–289; Helstosky, ditto). The interest accorded to peasant foods seems to be a European trend (Flandrin 1996: 722). It is worth mentioning too that Oliveira-Bello was a founder of the *Sociedade de Propaganda Nacional* [National Society of Propaganda] or *Touring Club de Portugal*, created in 1906 to promote tourism. Later, Oliveira-Bello also served as a member of the Tourism Authority during the *Estado Novo*. But even in this aspect, France was a source of inspiration. Oliveira-Bello was also a member of the board of the Automobile Club the Portugal. He was acquainted with the activity of the *Touring Club de France* and of the French automobile club, or the *Club des Cent*, both involved in the promotion of the regional cuisines of the nation – his book even records the visit of the president of the last one (Montanari 2010: 78–79).

There was no comparable inventory of Portuguese cuisine in the immediate aftermath of Oliveira-Bello's work. The work of Maria Odette

Cortes Valente, the first large-scale compilation of regional recipes, would appear only in 1973. Influential works by Maria de Lourdes Modesto (1999 [1981]) – the most printed of all Portuguese cookbooks – would follow this anthology in the aftermath of the democratic revolution of 1974. Modesto, who was also responsible for the most popular cooking shows on Portuguese television in the 1960s, claimed as her purpose to give the Portuguese the ‘gastronomic image of the old nation that we are’ (Modesto 1999: 6). She was also the co-author of another influential cookbook that recollected festive dishes linked to the Portuguese agricultural-religious calendar (Modesto, Praça and Calvet 1999).

Other works came out in the 1990s and 2000s, such as *Tesouros da Cozinha Tradicional Portuguesa* (Treasures of Traditional Portuguese Cuisine) (Abreu et al. 1984) and a series authored by Saramago,<sup>22</sup> where the nationalist effort for claiming a rich and varied cuisine for Portugal can be identified. There is a case for arguing that by emphasizing the value of a Portuguese national cuisine, stressing its regional variations, these texts still echo, albeit in a radically different context, some of the nationalist inspiration first found in earlier cookbooks of the twentieth century. With the end of Estado Novo in 1974 – and of its Empire in 1975 – there was a renewal of a nationalist inspiration. Democracy and socialist claims were then connected to a celebration of the people, its culture and traditions (Sobral 2007) – which goes a long way to explain the publication of major cookbooks. But in these post-colonial cookbooks, dishes from the former Empire, conspicuously present in Belo’s book, have disappeared. De-colonization was one of the main aims of the new democratic regime.

I must emphasize that I am not talking of an internal process. On the contrary, like what happened in earlier moments, this was also part of an international trend linked to the celebration of regional and local foods and of the creation of new national cuisines, as shown, for example, in the case of Belize in the last decades of the twentieth century (Wilk 2002). International agencies like UNESCO, through the inclusion of cuisine in intangible heritage, and the European Union, through its certification programmes, played a great role, with the national ones, in the development of gastronationalism (DeSoucey 2010). Also, social movements such as those of the ‘counter-culture’ – influential among students in Portugal since the late 1960s, which feature a search for ‘roots’ – attracted people to ethnic and regional cuisines, reinforcing this process (Belasco 2005). Tourism, of course, not only continued but very much increased its role in these policies, geared to the commodification

both of the national and the local food and cuisine. There is nowadays a global industry of the local and the diverse and what is happening with Portuguese cuisine reflects this. As Wilk has pointed in his book on Belizean cuisine: 'The entire world's immense cultural varieties become equivalent to each other; they become local customs, local religions, local dances that are uniform if not in their content . . . The world becomes a pageant of diversity with its differences neatly organized and selected' (Wilk 2006: 196). Foods and cuisine branded as national have found a niche in the global market.

## Conclusion

In *Cooking, Cuisine and Class*, Jack Goody drew attention to the fact that cooking and cuisine are the products of complex historical processes. Here I have taken his inspiration in trying to highlight the presence of these in an attempt to explain the making of a Portuguese national cuisine.

Until the first decades of the twentieth century, international cuisine, mainly French haute cuisine, was the more prestigious. This was the preference of the upper classes, the ones who could indulge in expensive ingredients that needed to be imported, and beyond the reach of the middle or working classes. In this regard, we can compare the behaviour of the Portuguese elites of the modern period to the ones that Goody mentions in his work.

There was a nationalist reaction against the dominance of this cuisine from the nineteenth century onwards. In the twentieth century, under the auspices of an authoritarian regime first and a democratic one after, we can see the construction of a Portuguese national cuisine, in which state intervention played an essential role. Although the affluent classes could still consume a foreign, cosmopolitan haute cuisine, they also came to recognize the value of so-called national dishes of vernacular inspiration. The construction of a national cuisine was, of course, a selective process. Some foods were forgotten, especially those that could remind poverty and hunger. Among the so-called typical dishes of the Portuguese cuisine, the 'richer' ones became over-represented. But if high cuisine is widely present – as in dessert confections composed of egg yolk and sugar in large quantities – the low is also incorporated as, for example, in the case of a bread soup flavoured with garlic and coriander, popular among farm workers in the south or in the case of tripe with beans, a popular dish in the north, or through the presence of various types of pork sausages. These processes involved

invention – in fact, the very idea of a national cuisine is an invention – recreation and codification, by putting into writing recipes previously transmitted orally, hence constructing a culinary canon.<sup>23</sup>

As has been highlighted in the case of India (Appadurai 1988), Denmark (Gold 2006) or Russia (Smith 2008), for example, cookbooks are important instruments in the process of ‘nationalizing’ a country’s cuisine. Goody contributes to our understanding of the processes of creation of national cuisines because of the emphasis he puts on the consequences of writing. Writing is historically linked to formality and hierarchy – as is reflected both in menus and cookbooks. Oral cuisine, such as the one of the peasantry, depends on a restricted number of recipes and foods; it is learned on the spot by seeing and practicing. Writing broadens the base of cuisine and allows for the diffusion of this abstract knowledge to a potentially much greater number of readers and professionals. Writing enables the creation of national cuisines by assembling diverse culinary traditions in cookbooks. They established (national) boundaries that separated artificially culinary practices that were common across the borders – it happened in the case of Portugal and Spain – and constructed a national whole from a vast array of regionally and socially differentiated cuisines assembling in the same corpus the ‘high’ and the ‘low’. And it is through writing that a national cuisine can be transmitted and reified. For Smith,

national cuisines are composed of real foods that have real meanings, but that are not necessarily synonymous either with all the foods actually eaten by all citizens of a given nation or actual age – old tradition in a given place. Instead, they have been built, sometimes consciously, sometimes not, out of the history of given nations, with all the complications such a construction implies.

(Smith 2012: 446)

We should not forget the context in which such processes of culinary nationalization took place. In our case, this began and took place at a moment when the state, through basic teaching, monuments and patriotic rituals was involved in transforming the Portuguese in (more) self-conscious nationals; and at a time when capitalism, modern transportation and the modern printing press put an end to local and regional isolation and contributed to an increasing dissemination of awareness of belonging to a national community.<sup>24</sup> It became a part of banal nationalism, ‘a collection of ideological habits (including habits of practice and belief) which establish nations as nations’ (Billig 1995: 6).

Food habits are among these. Cuisine has been playing a role in the nationalist enterprise since the close of the twentieth century, not only symbolic but also economic. Today, ‘branding the nation’ (Aronczyk 2007: 105–128) through the advertising industry – which is only possible because of writing – connected to the commodification of food production and cuisine, is an important economic strategy in Portugal as in other countries worldwide (Wilk 2002; 2006).

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## Notes

1. Governmental Resolution 96/2000, *Diário da República* n. 171, I Série -B, 26 July 2000: 3618–3620.
2. <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/fr/RL/00437>, accessed 3 April 2013.
3. BN Esp. E 19/2121; E 19/2124; E19/2125; E19/2137; E19/2153; E19/2156; E19/2157; E19/2171; E19/2178.
4. BN Esp. E 19/2117; E 19/2133; E 19/2178.
5. Menus BN E 19/2179 and E 19/2140, respectively.
6. BN Esp. D4 1613–10.
7. ANTT, Casa Palmela, Mf. 5752 (63 menus); Mf. 5770 (10 menus) Mf. 5771 (1 menu); Mfs. 5886/5887 (1154 menus) [Dukes of Palmela].
8. ANTT, Casa Palmela, Mfs. 5886/5887 (menus from the 3th and 4th duchesses (from 1921 to 1950).
9. ANTT, Casa Palmela, Mf. 5752.
10. ANTT, Casa Palmela, Mfs. 5770/5771.
11. ANTT, AHMF, Casa Real, Cxs. 7782/7783 (106 menus), 7476 (3 menus).
12. ANTT, AHMF, Casa Real, Cx. 7349.
13. ANTT, AHMF, Casa Real, Cx. 5228.
14. An *escabeche* coming from Mexican/Mestizo culture, and hence from Spain, is an element of the new ‘national’ cuisine of Belize (Wilk 2002: 75).
15. B.N. Cod. 7376.
16. The original work by Mme Aglanson (1775–1852) is *La Maison de campagne* (1822).
17. Up to the 1940s, at least, bread, followed by potatoes, was still the main foodstuff among the rural and urban working classes; other more frequent staples included vegetable soups, bacon, sardines and cheap salted cod (very small) (Cruz 1843; Mendes-Corrêa 1951: 31–77).

18. The burial or cod trial that takes place on Easter Saturday is a satirical play that mockingly marks the end of abstinence from meat, for a testimony from the beginning of the nineteenth century Costa (1817).
19. Ferguson develops this concept from Bourdieu's *champ* (Bourdieu 1979).
20. The expression 'nationalization of the masses' is taken from a book by George Mosse (1975), which refers to Germany.
21. Pellegrino Artusi's *La Scienza in Cucina e L'Arte Di Mangiar Bene* (2007[1891]), Torino: Einaudi. See on its role in the creation of an Italian national cuisine and its connections with Italian nationalism Piero Camporesi's introduction in this same edition.
22. Saramago authored a series of books on the Portuguese regional cuisine, where recipes are accompanied by historical and ethnographic introductions. See, for example, book on the North-West Region (2000).
23. See on these kinds of processes, referring to regional cuisines (Montanari 2010).
24. I am indebted to the analysis of Eugen Weber (1977), although the Portuguese case does not offer the linguistic and cultural regional diversity that he stressed in nineteenth century France.

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 ANTT, Casa Palmela, Mfs. 5752, 5770, 5771, 5886, 5887 [House of the Dukes of Palmela]  
 Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa or BN [National Library, Lisboa]  
 Reservados  
 Espólios Literários: BN Esp. E19; BN Esp. D4 [Menus from Ramalho Ortigão and Carlos Malheiros Dias]  
 Henriques, Francisco Borges, *Receitas de milhores doces e de alguns guizados particularares e remédios de conhecida experiência que fêz Francisco Borges Henriques para o uso da sua casa. No anno de 1715* (B.N. Cod. 7376).

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# 7

## Indigestion in the Long Nineteenth Century: Aspects of English Taste and Anxiety, 1800–1950

*Stephen Mennell*

This chapter has a tangential connection with Jack Goody. Our first contact came back in about 1981. As a still relatively junior academic at the University of Exeter, I had been working for a couple of years on the book that became *All Manners of Food* (Mennell [1985] 1996) when to my alarm I saw an advance announcement from Cambridge University Press of *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* by the great Jack Goody (1982). With my heart in my boots, I wrote to him, explaining what I was doing and asking whether my research duplicated his. He replied in a little note saying no, he thought there would be little overlap. Actually, he was wrong: there is a bit of overlap in the description of the culinary history of Western Europe. When my book came out, he wrote a review in which he said that, instead of comparing England and France, I should have compared European cuisine with an unstratified Third World cuisine – precisely what he had done.

Even before I started my own research, I had been intrigued by certain popular beliefs about food that I had encountered – casually among friends and relatives – and which are still sometimes found among older generations of English people, despite the major transformation of eating that became apparent from around 1960. I refer particularly to beliefs about which foods cause indigestion and other discomforts – physical and social – and the anxieties associated with them. I then found documentary evidence to substantiate my impressions and to give them an historical foundation (as well as documentary evidence that equivalent avoidances appeared largely absent in France). I explored some of these questions, particularly in my chapter on ‘food dislikes’, under the subheadings of ‘trained incapacity to enjoy food’, the ‘nursery

food syndrome' and 'fear of after-effects' – which included 'indigestion, bad breath, etc'. (Mennell 1985: 291–316). The mainstream of anthropological thinking in the 1980s tended to view such topics under the general heading of taboo, treating them as features of the 'culture' of the community being studied – often seen, as Goody pointed out, in too homogeneous terms and frequently with an implicit assumption derived from the then-dominant structuralism that food avoidances form a sort of fixed and more or less unchanging inherited pattern.<sup>1</sup> Or, if it is not fixed, it was assumed that the evidence did not exist through which to trace the development of such patterns in those communities.

I followed Jack Goody in his assessment of the anthropological legacy of the functionalist and the structuralist studies of food and joined him in advocating a more developmental perspective on these matters (Goody 1982: chapter 2). The main difference between us was that I had been sensitized to the interest of the sociology of food – and especially to the fears surrounding food avoidances – by having already fallen under the intellectual influence of Norbert Elias. I had already concluded, for example, that Lévi-Strauss's work was a prime example of what Elias described as 'process reduction' – a sort of Kantian pursuit of constants underlying change (Elias 2012: 108–116, 219–220). I agreed with Goody that a reality-adequate developmental perspective had to recognize that neither the 'symbolic' nor the 'material' view alone was enough. In his extraordinarily productive years of retirement, Goody (like Elias in *his* retirement) has produced a vast and diverse body of work that constitutes a major contribution to the revival of comparative-historical anthropology – indeed, to comparative-historical research in the humanities and social sciences more broadly. He and I continue to differ, however, over the merits of the theories of Norbert Elias.<sup>2</sup> Elias and Goody seem to have got off on the wrong foot when they met in Ghana in the early 1960s; that is a pity because in my view they have a lot in common, and a more positive dialogue between them might have been highly productive (Liston and Mennell 2009).<sup>3</sup> I mention this because the topic of this chapter – the bodily discomfort of indigestion and, in particular, the *fear* of indigestion bordering on a socially generated feeling of *guilt* – is a rather Eliasian one.

## The problem

In its broadest terms the problem is the assumption, apparently widespread in the nineteenth and early twentieth century England, that eating was seldom an unalloyed pleasure, and the equally widespread

anxiety associated with many sorts of food. In particular, certain foods were linked through anxiety with indigestion, bad breath, flatulence and farting. The distinguished British scholar-cook Jane Grigson (1928–1990) captured it well in her remarks on leeks and onions ‘tainting the breath’:

It seems to have been a major nightmare at the time, not just a silly refinement. I remember my grandmother’s obsession with her digestive system, her purges and peppermint tablets; I remember too, how constipation hung over some families like a mushroom cloud. If digestions were as bad as all this suggests, and they probably were when diets were stodgy without fruit or many vegetables, the breath must often have been bad. Anything that could have added to the social fear – leek, onion, above all garlic – was prudently avoided, or subdued by strong-armwater treatment.

(Grigson 1978: 291)

In my later research, I looked mainly at what members of the medical profession wrote about diet and indigestion, in books addressed chiefly to the general public rather than to their medical brethren. Apart from books that I had already found and consulted while writing *All Manners of Food*, I made use of John Fuller’s wonderful collection of all sorts of food-related books in the library of Oxford Brookes University. Although Fuller’s collection includes many books in French as well as English, I found no evidence to contradict my earlier impression that ‘fear of eating’ was not a French problem. As I argued in *All Manners of Food*, there is little evidence for the assumption often expressed by popular writers of food history that ‘Puritanism’ destroyed English cuisine in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and made English people feel guilty about enjoying their food (Mennell 1985: 103–108). It was only in the early nineteenth century that what E.P. Thompson calls an ‘all-embracing Thou Shalt Not’ came to permeate *all* religious persuasions in varying degree – and that would appear to be a common response to the social transformation and increasing constraints of industrialization rather than a simultaneous movement of the spirit among the diverse denominations (Thompson 1968: 11).<sup>4</sup>

This chapter, unlike *All Manners of Food*, therefore reports only British sources and focuses on the shorter period of 1800–1950, roughly from Sinclair’s (1806) massive four volume synthesis of previous medical opinion on the subject until the post-Second-World-War era when the ‘Maginot Line’ of British culinary culture began visibly to crumble.

I must emphasize that I do not regard medical opinion as the one-sided cause of popular attitudes. Medical opinion appears to me to reflect popular opinion as well as helping to shape it in turn. This opinion is influenced by Norbert Elias's finding that, from the late Middle Ages until the nineteenth century, the social standards of outward bodily propriety that he traced through manners books in French, German, English and Italian changed *first*, and medical opinion followed – medical opinion tended to follow and to buttress popular opinion of the time on matters such as spitting and nose-blowing rather than leading it. As he argued,

over a long period and in conjunction with a specific change in human relationships – that is, in society – the threshold of repugnance advanced. The affect-structure, the sensitivity, and the behaviour of people changed, despite all sorts of fluctuations, in a quite specific direction. Then, at a certain point, this behaviour came to be recognised as 'hygienically correct' – which is to say, it was justified by a clearer insight into causal connections and taken further in the same direction or consolidated. The advance of the threshold of repugnance may have been connected at specific points with more or less indeterminate and, at first, not rationally explicable experiences of the way in which certain diseases are passed on, or, expressed more precisely, with indeterminate and therefore rationally unlimited fears and anxieties which pointed vaguely in the direction subsequently confirmed by clear understanding. But 'rational understanding' is not the motor of the 'civilising' of eating or of other ways of behaving.

(Elias 2012: 117)

For Elias, the pre-eminent 'motor' of such changes was what I have called 'reasons of respect' (Mennell 1998: 47). He showed that new social standards of behaviour and feeling were typically at first justified on the grounds that they showed respect to social superiors (and were often initially mandatory only in their presence). Failure to observe them laid one open to social humiliation, greatly feared; over time, indeed from generation to generation, observance became more automatic, part of habitus or 'second nature'. This process of change was particularly characteristic of periods of high social mobility, when (as at the end of the Middle Ages and again in the nineteenth century<sup>5</sup>) established upper classes experienced 'pressure from below', and sought to distance themselves from those below them by adopting evermore refined and demanding standards – which were then copied by the

ascendant groups. Elias calls the process 'colonisation and repulsion', and I have referred to it as the 'concertina effect'. Its effects in general trickle down gradually at least to the 'respectable working class'. (Trickle up also occurs, when power ratios are becoming relatively more equal.) At the sociogenetic level, it has often resulted in the reconstitution of a new upper class from elements of diverse social origin. At the psychogenetic level, steady and consistent external constraint to observe more demanding standards is conducive to the formation of more automatic, more even, and socially more generally applicable self-constraints; this process of conversion of constraints is the kernel of what Elias means by a civilizing process. In short, Jane Grigson spotted something of considerable sociological significance in her pithy remark about the social fears associated with certain foods.

### The dire consequences of eating

In the pre-Pasteurian age, medical opinion sometimes ran to hyperbole in claiming that food was the source of all illness. In 1806, Sir John Sinclair, President of the Board of Agriculture, said,

Many are the causes of ill health, but the principal one is the variety and excess of food. No man, says Galen, would ever be seized with a disease, who takes sufficient care to avoid crudities or indigestion; that is, who eats no more than he can digest: and Cheyne<sup>6</sup> remarks that what is eaten and drunk, and taken into the habit, is the original cause of almost all the diseases which afflict mankind.

(Sinclair 1806: 201)

Towards the end of the century, the distinguished physician Sir Henry Thompson described the effects of introducing children to the sophisticated food of their parents' table as follows:

And soon afterwards commence in consequence – and entirely in consequence, a fact it is impossible too much to emphasise – the 'sick headaches' and 'bilious attacks' which pursue their victim through half a lifetime, to be exchanged for gout or worse at or before the great climacteric.

(Thompson 1880: 4)

And in 1930, well post-Pasteur, Dorothy Morton, a dietician and lecturer in domestic science, was writing,

At no stage in the life of the growing boy or girl should signs of indigestion be passed by and disregarded. The poisons formed in the stomach pass into circulation; it is a physical impossibility for the youthful one to do justice to himself or his teachers, and the effect upon his future life may be very serious.

(Morton 1930: 12)

### **Luxury, temperance, self-discipline**

The general opinion of the doctors was that 'frugal fare is the foundation of health and the greatest preventative of disease' (Abernethy 1856 [c.1820]: 15). In one of the most widely reprinted, pirated and influential pamphlets on the subject written in the nineteenth century, John Abernethy, FRS and Surgeon at St Bartholomew's Hospital, argued that

Indigestion is the disease of a luxurious people, and always presupposes a high state of civilisation;<sup>7</sup> in a state of barbarity, or in one little removed from it, men eat to support life only, but as civilisation progresses, eating becomes a luxury, and the art of cookery advances into a science.... The indiscriminate appetite for every species of stimulative food – the constant accompaniment of an advanced state of civilisation – is highly prejudicial to a healthy action of the digestive organs. The disease occurs but seldom among the peasantry, whose food is of the simplest kind, and the simpler food is, provided always that there is a sufficient quantity, the more conducive is it to robust health and longevity.

(Abernethy 1856 [c.1820]: 15, 14)

Sinclair dwells more on the need for restraint in quantitative overeating:

It would, no doubt, be advisable, occasionally to abstain from food, or at least to reduce the usual quantity, as a means of preserving health, when persons, living in the usual state of European society, must often indulge more than is necessary. But it must not be imagined that abstinence is attended with no risk or danger to those who have been accustomed to regular supplies of food... A temperate diet... is the only infallible nostrum for the prevention of disease.

(Sinclair 1806: 199)

But if overindulgence was a common cause of poor digestion and health problems, for some people excessive self-denial, an unevenness

in self-control, was already a greater problem. Sinclair in fact regarded it as medically easier to rectify 'the troublesome fulness which is caused by over-eating' than the effects of excessive abstinence. 'How many young women, with a view of reducing their corpulency, stint their appetites and ruin their health for ever' (Sinclair 1806: 200).

A century later, Dr Cecil Webb-Johnson, writing on 'diet for women', still regarded it as 'one of the curses of modern civilisation that we eat too much', and did his none-too-subtle best to make women conscious of the connection between self-denial and sex appeal:

The woman who indulges in over-eating and over-drinking risks a muddy, shiny or spotty complexion, and powders, creams and rouge, though they help to hide these defects, seldom deceive anyone.

Any woman who takes a pride in her personal appearance and wishes to retain youth and beauty, must, of necessity, study the question of diet. No man admires thick and ugly ankles or a spotty face any more than he admires a woman who is always complaining of aches and pains, real or imaginary.

(Webb-Johnson 1922: Preface)

## Fear of bad smells and constipation

Discussions of indigestion intertwine with the subject of constipation, or costiveness as it was often more delicately termed, and in both contexts there are allusions to the social fears of making bad smells (on the social significance of food-related smells, see also Pottier, this volume). Sometimes the allusions are rather discreet. Sinclair recommends caraway seeds as 'the mildest carminative we have', making clear that by that he means combating 'flatulence of the *primae viae*' (Sinclair 1806: 182). Paris is more explicit:

Flatulence is often a very distressing disease; it sometimes is associated with acidity, but frequently is the only symptom which indicates an imperfect digestion.... In some cases it appears to contain sulphuretted hydrogen gas, and eructations take place which are characterised by the smell of rotten eggs. Where this occurs, we may infer the existence of great alimentary disturbance.... Ordinary cases of flatus, however, are of a different nature; the air appears to be the product of fermentation, and, by avoiding such vegetables as are known to be susceptible of it, the disease has been removed.

(Paris 1826: 267)

Alain Corbin has documented the rising social sensitivity to bad smells in the nineteenth-century France, but the French do not seem to have focused on vegetables or other foods as a particular menace (Corbin 1986).

The surgeon Edward Jukes in 1831 wrote a whole book on 'indigestion and costiveness'. 'Costiveness', he claimed, 'may be considered, from whatever cause it arises, to be the forerunner and the foundation of most disorders that render our lives wretched or terminate fatally' (Jukes 1831: 35). Jukes advocated eating more vegetables (as well as brown bread and certain other foods) to alleviate the problem, which shows that there could be some conflict of medical recommendation if the patient suffered both from costiveness and 'flatus'. In other respects, Jukes conformed pretty much to medical orthodoxy on indigestible foods. But his principal concern was to advocate the regular use of enemas, for the self-administration of which he had himself invented a new apparatus (euphemistically and inaccurately called a 'stomach pump'). French ladies, he claimed, used a 'lavement' daily, as habitually as cleaning their teeth (Jukes 1831: 84). (Jukes appears to have been confused between colonic irrigation and a bidet.) The English, on the other hand, felt acute embarrassment at the procedure (especially as earlier apparatuses had required the assistance of another person) and relied instead on excessive and harmful use of laxatives. Jukes is especially revealing on the subject of the embarrassment felt – especially it would seem among females – at the 'bodily functions'. He describes the case of a young lady patient who eventually died of internal disorders – despite the best efforts of Jukes and his 'stomach pump'. He mentions 'that remarkable delicacy had characterised this lady from her earliest years, and that she would not allow it to be known, even to her own sex, that her bowels required relief, and not even her own mother was ever permitted to be acquainted with those facts' (Jukes 1831: 56). At the post-mortem, her rectum was found to be almost completely blocked by a huge mass of calcified matter that must have prevented evacuation for months before decease. No doubt that was an extreme case, but Jukes speaks more generally of

that false notion of delicacy which so much prevails in boarding schools... and the dislike of its being known that the calls of nature require to be relieved. Owing to this, restraint is frequently imposed on the regular functions of these organs, which, in consequence of it, soon become the seat of malady.

(Jukes 1831: 35–36)

His remarks seem well justified in view of the stress placed on the disciplining and regulation of defecation and urination in schools during the period (Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.2 ).<sup>8</sup>

Overall, these cumulative anxieties seem to have resulted in many people simply eliminating one suspected item after another from their diet. Paris remarked that the effect of conflicting medical opinion might be to lead 'the valetudinarian incapable of healthy reflection, and ever seeking for causes of fear and anxiety ... to suspect the seeds of disease in every dish, and poison in every cup' (Paris 1826: 2). Again, right down to the interwar years, it was quite common to be advised to 'avoid everything that disagrees with you, no matter how pleasing it may be to the palate' (Jack 1921: 431). There seems to have been little awareness of how self-defeating that could be, although in 1928 Dr J. Browning Alexander spoke in a lecture of 'the dyspepsia of starvation', which was

due to the fact that the sufferer eliminates article after article from his diet until a diet of almost complete starvation is established. A vicious circle is thus produced, by which the patient is dyspeptic because he is starved, and starves because he is dyspeptic. The only way to prevent such a calamity is to pay no heed to the dyspepsia, but to stimulate the appetite so that the vicious circle may be broken.

(Alexander in Senn 1928)



Figure 7.1 Edward Jukes on indigestion and costiveness

92.

**FLEXIBLE CLYSMADUCT.**

I shall now proceed to give a number of recipes for medicated injections, which may be thrown up by means of either of the above apparatuses, and with the utmost benefit in a number of diseases.

Figure 7.2 Edward Jukes on indigestion and costiveness

## Indigestible foods: the medical orthodoxy

Paris's fears about the conflicting advice proffered by the plethora of books about diet early in the nineteenth century were partly misplaced. There gradually emerged a quite solid consensus about items of food that were to be avoided on grounds of indigestibility. The orthodoxy was set outmost fully by Dr John Abernethy (1764–1831), whose *Code of Health and Long Life, with the Cause and Cure of Indigestion* was constantly reprinted under various titles from the 1820s until late in the century. Abernethy's tables of relative digestibility and indigestibility are excerpted in the appendix to this chapter. Perhaps because he set them out in tabular form, his views acquired the greater impact that stems from definiteness and even dogmatism. Much the same ideas had been set out before by Sinclair, among others, but at greater length and in more tolerant and tentative fashion. Some authors made more allowance than others for what they termed 'idiosyncrasies' – the peculiar reaction of a particular person's digestive organs to a particular item of food. But the central orthodoxy was quite consistent among pretty well all the doctors, domestic science teachers and cookery writers who discussed the subject over the period of more than a century under consideration.

Among meats, mutton was considered by far the most digestible, followed by beef. Lamb and veal were considered problematic for many stomachs, especially for the young. And pork was considered extremely difficult to digest. Among fish, oily species like herring and sprats were regarded as very difficult. As for farinaceous foods, wheat – always socially the most prestigious flour – was considered more easily digestible, and the scale descended through rice, rye, oatmeal and barley to peasemeal – all this coinciding with the social hierarchy of prestige established at least since the Middle Ages. Abernethy mentioned, however, that oats were very digestible when made up into gruel – a view quite endorsed by Mr Woodhouse in Jane Austen's *Emma*. The seal of Woodhousean approval would also have been granted to Abernethy's opinion on eggs: 'The yolk...very generally suits the dyspeptic stomach; if lightly boiled, its digestion is hardly ever felt' (Abernethy, c.1820: 51) – wording strongly resembling Mr Woodhouse's remark that 'An egg boiled very soft is not unwholesome'. *Emma* was published in 1815, so perhaps Abernethy's little book was circulating earlier than the surviving oldest copies.<sup>9</sup>

Opinions about vegetables varied somewhat more, but as will be seen from the tables, Abernethy was enthusiastic (like many of his successors)

about asparagus and regarded carrots, parsnips and peas as 'generally unsuited to the dyspeptic', with even cabbage ranking only just above this. Again, it is striking that the staple foods of the common people are considered by medical opinion to be most prone to cause dyspepsia. Views very close to Abernethy's continued to be endorsed by many successors, including Jukes, Chavasse, Barker, Pereira and Bennett (Jukes 1831: 65ff.; Chavasse 1839; Barker 1850: 49–50; Pereira 1843: 529; Bennett in Morris 1883: 113).

Another aspect of Abernethy's advice frequently repeated by successors was that all fruits – apples, pears, grapes, whatever – ought to be peeled on the grounds that the skins were indigestible. This helps to draw attention to something that to twenty-first-century eyes is rather obvious: that the concern with eliminating everything 'indigestible' must have served to make constipation still more prevalent. But the dilemma posed by popular preferences was rarely stated forcefully until food reformers – regarded as at least mildly eccentric – like Dr Josiah Oldfield made the point crystal clear. Writing from the Lady Margaret Fruitarian Hospital, Doddington, Kent, Dr Oldfield argued as follows:

Now the popular cry is for foods that are 'digestible', and advertisements praise the foods they boom [sic] on the ground that they are completely digestible.

If we live on these foods, we are bound to be constipated, because there is not sufficient work provided for the excreting muscles to work upon.

We must not avoid foods because they are partly indigestible . . .

Concentrated digestible foods cause indigestion, and should be avoided. Indigestible foods do not cause indigestion, but they do prevent constipation, and should be regularly used.

(Oldfield 1929: 32)

Oldfield mentions precisely grape skins – so often peeled off at the behest of orthodox medical opinion – as beneficial in this respect. More orthodox writers like Webb-Johnson were also by then demanding a greater proportion of vegetables and 'roughage' in the diet (Webb-Johnson 1922: 20, 38–40).

### **To drink or not to drink with meals**

Another way in which medical opinion – whether influencing or influenced by popular belief – contributed to the prevalence of constipation

was in discouraging the drinking of any liquids with meals. Here it is fair to say that medical opinion was far from unanimous. Sinclair wrote,

Some advise those persons whose stomachs are weak, and digestion imperfect, to take their food as dry as possible, or to drink as little as they can of any liquid with their meat. But where this restriction is attempted, it is apt to produce, or to increase, a costive habit, the source of many disorders.

(Sinclair 1806: 116)

Abernethy, however, to whom the anti-liquid view was most frequently attributed later, argued forcibly that any fluid taken with meals served only to dilute the digestive juices and thus to diminish their effectiveness (Abernethy 1856 [c.1820]: 30–31). Jukes, whose central interest was constipation, took absolutely the contrary view (Jukes 1831: 69), but the Abernethian opinion was endorsed by Barker and many others down to Webb-Johnson (Barker 1850: 51; Webb-Johnson 1922: 79; Webb-Johnson 1923: 46). The same view is expressed with great force by the eccentric gastronome Scotson-Clark (1924), and my personal experience is that the same hydrophobic prejudice still persists among a minority – mainly of the older generation – today.

### **The intergenerational transmission of anxiety: the nursery food 'syndrome' revisited**

The dominant opinions about foods to be avoided were transmitted to a wide public via books on child-rearing. Of these, the bestseller throughout Queen Victoria's reign and well into the twentieth century was *Advice to Mothers on the Management of their Offspring* by the Birmingham General Practitioner Pye Henry Chavasse (1810–79). First published in 1839, it passed through 13 editions before the author's death and was then revised by other hands in a further nine editions, the last of which appeared as recently as 1948. The book sold on a prodigious scale: in the 11th edition of 1873, Chavasse mentions that it was then selling about 5000 copies a year, with French and American editions in addition; the 1898 edition is claimed to be the '240th thousand' and that of 1913 the '340th thousand'.<sup>10</sup> This unbroken run is an unrivalled source of evidence for the slowly changing advice offered by medical authorities on the rearing of children.<sup>11</sup> Here there is space only for a brief outline of the more constant elements.

Chavasse made no claim to originality (1839: iv) but faithfully transmitted received opinion on such matters as the indigestibility of pork:

Q. Have you any objection to pork for a change?

A. I have the greatest objection to it. It is a rich, gross, and therefore unwholesome food for the delicate stomachs of children. I have known it, in several instances, produce violent pain, sickness, purging and convulsions. It being a gross meat, if a child be fed much upon it, it will be likely to produce eruptions of the skin.

(Chavasse 1839: 76)<sup>12</sup>

Chavasse was a great advocate of floury potatoes (not waxy) but had little enthusiasm for most other vegetables:

Q. Do you approve of any other vegetables for a child?

A. I do not, except it be occasionally a few asparagus heads... Greens and trash should not be given. Meat, potatoes and hunger for their sauce... is the best, and, indeed, should be the only dinner they should have.

(Chavasse 1839: 77, 122)

In later editions, he somewhat widened the range of desirable vegetables and fruits – though always with skins and pips removed. Bread was a staple, yet it had to be stale – two or three days old – before it was digestible. Chavasse was in no way eccentric. Here is his contemporary, T.H. Barker, on the same tack:

Ripe fruits, such as orange, strawberries, currents, a few grapes – the skins being rejected – and roasted apples may be allowed, but stone fruits and nuts must be avoided, also dried fruits, with the exception of figs. Whatever variations may be made, let the whole course of diet be simple, bland and nutritious. Avoid pastry, pork, veal, salt-beef, new or heavy bread, tea-cakes, strong tea, sweetmeats and especially... all alcoholic beverages.

(Barker 1850: 51–52)

The unanimous condemnation of pork, incidentally, cannot to my mind be unconnected with the fact that it was the staple meat of the poor in the countryside. One recalls the assertion by André L. Simon (1877–1970, founder of the Wine and Food Society) that ‘the only part of the pig which is introduced into polite gastronomic society is the Ham’ (Simon 1929: 102). Contrary to modern caution about eating too

much salt ('Oh, the odium of eating sodium'), Chavasse in later editions urged that the child ought always to be accustomed to eat salt with his dinner. 'Let a mother see that this advice is followed, or evil consequences will ensue' (1873 edn: 104 and subsequent editions).

The concern with constipation and 'wind' began early in life:

Q. Do you approve of carraway seeds or currents in bread or cakes; the former to disperse wind, the latter to open bowels?

A. There is nothing better than plain bread: the carraway seeds generally pass through the bowels undigested; and thus may irritate and produce, instead of disperse, wind. Some mothers put currents in cakes, with a view of opening the bowels; but they only open them by disordering them.

(Chavasse 1839: 81–82)<sup>13</sup>

Chavasse and many other authors pepper their advice with anxious references to 'the child's delicate stomach'. Only the plainest food should be given, and if children were allowed to eat with the parents – which Chavasse himself favoured on the grounds that it helped make them ladies and gentlemen – only food acceptable to both adults and children should be set on the table. In the 1898 revision, the editor, Dr G. Carpenter thought it necessary to qualify Chavasse's own relatively liberal answer with the warning:

Only the plainest should be on the table, and he must not be allowed all and sundry to taste. If the latter be permitted, his satisfaction with his own simple food will be a thing of the past, and it would be far better, rather than this should occur, to allow him to take his meals in the nursery under the supervision of a competent person.

(Chavasse 1898 edn: 159–160)<sup>14</sup>

Sir Henry Thompson in similar vein has already been quoted. Bland food was the order – well, not of the day, but of the century. As late as 1930, Dorothy Morton could write:

Foods with a distinctive flavour are not desirable until the sense of taste is more fully developed, and highly-seasoned, pungent and spicy foods are best left to stimulate the jaded palates of the elders.

(Morton 1930: 11)

This was hardly a way to create a nation of gastronomes! Only in the 1950s did opinion begin to swing round. Then, in a book sold on both

sides of the Atlantic, Dr Benjamin Spock and Dr Miriam Loewenberg felt able to report that lists of foods 'labelled taboo' for children were growing shorter. 'We have attained a more healthy respect for the digestive system of young children than we had twenty or even ten years ago' (Spock and Lowenberg 1955: 157). Yet even today, the nursery food syndrome persists in Britain, though perhaps in a slightly different form. Reporting it as news, in an article entitled 'Healthiest children "eat just like Mum and Dad"', on 5 May 2013 *The Observer* quoted Dr Valeria Skafida of the University of Edinburgh as saying that Britain was 'almost alone in Europe in "dumbing down" with children's meals in restaurants and at home, rather than encouraging them to eat what the adults were eating'. Nowadays, it may not be so much bland foods as tasty burgers, chips, baked beans and Coca-Cola, the result of manipulation of parents by children. If so, this is an interesting manifestation of the changing balance of power between parents and children (see Elias 2008: 14–40). But the British tradition of children not being brought up to eat adult food remains the same.<sup>15</sup> And so, apparently, does parental worry about what their children eat.

With so much anxiety abroad among adults concerning indigestible foods, it is scarcely surprising that faddiness was frequently mentioned as a problem among children. It would take us too far afield to discuss currents of opinion on whether children should be made to eat food placed before them – most medical opinion seems to have been against it, though evidence of popular opinion running in its favour is abundant. Only at a very late stage does it seem to have occurred to anyone that adult anxieties were being unconsciously and unintentionally transmitted to the next generation. In 1929, Dr Isie Younger Ross – a sensible-sounding lady – advised parents:

Children are very imitative, so never discuss personal dislikes of food at the table. If the father says he does not like a certain food, you will find that the child sooner or later says he, too, does not like it, and will begin to find some fault with it.

(Ross 1929: 63)

Dorothy Morton echoed this a year later:

Those responsible for a child's upbringing should be able to distinguish between the genuine aversion and the adopted fad. The parent or guardian who discusses the child's whims in his presence is often to blame in the latter case. Anyone at all cognisant of the nature of

a child will agree with Shakespeare that, 'They'll take suggestion as a cat laps milk'. It would be well if this fact were remembered by elders who are in the habit of discussing their own likes and dislikes in the child's presence. As a rule, if food is put before the child *without any comment being made*, there is no difficulty experienced in getting the child to eat it.

(Morton 1930: 10, emphasis added)

It seems highly unlikely that many parents ever followed Morton's prescription of Trappist silence.<sup>16</sup> But even if they had, it would be depressing. For if some English people were becoming more aware of how the widespread anxiety surrounding eating was being transmitted from generation to generation, the proposed solution – say nothing about the food, treat it as unmentionable – was scarcely calculated to create a nation of discriminating gourmets taking an intelligent and enjoyable interest in their food. Once again, there is a startling contrast with France.

## Conclusions

The main points that seem to emerge from the books I have studied are as follows. First, food and faulty eating habits were seen as a principal cause of many illnesses – sometimes as *the* principal cause – and in particular the acquisition of defective eating habits in childhood was thought to lead to digestive problems, debilitation and early demise in adults. Second, 'correct' eating habits were seen as part of the wider struggle for temperance, bodily self-control, and moral self-discipline. Third, as Jane Grigson guessed, fears of indigestion, constipation, bad breath, burping and farting were both interlinked and intense. Fourth, although medical opinion was never unanimous, there emerged a durable central orthodoxy about the digestibility of specific foods – an orthodoxy that I suspect was influenced by, as much as it influenced, popular anxieties. (I also suspect that – as so often – the cheaper and abundant foods of the common people were considered indigestible by social superiors, including medical men.) Fifth, acute anxiety centred on children's eating habits, and it is easy to see how this anxiety was transmitted from generation to generation with great continuity from the early nineteenth century until at least the 1930s so that its legacy is still with us among some members of the older generation today.

I am highly sceptical about the merits of seeing medical opinion as an 'independent variable', unfolding according to its own internal scientific

logic, uninfluenced by pre-existing attitudes in society at large. In *All Manners of Food*, I expressed equal scepticism about religion being the independent causal influence people often assume it to be. These aspects of attitudes towards food seem to be part of a wider pattern of self-denial and self-discipline – related, it would appear, to a civilizing process (remembering that a civilizing process involves psychic costs and pains).

This historical research needs to be connected with the investigation of present-day food likes and dislikes. I suspect that the Victorian legacy is still to some extent with us, but we need to know to what extent the last half century has seen a dramatic breach with older attitudes. Medical people are interested in how best to give their patients advice that will supplant older ‘popular’ beliefs about food and lead them to adopt eating habits in line with the best modern medical knowledge – evidently an uphill struggle in an age of increasingly prevalent obesity.<sup>17</sup> What this small research project points to, however, is the *possibility* that ‘popular’ attitudes are rooted not – or not entirely – in a country’s ancient folklore and culinary culture but in medical opinion or other supposedly authoritative dietary advice as it was in the past. True, medical opinion may always have been shaped by popular culture as well as by Galen. That does not change the probability that present-day doctors and dieticians may to some extent be pitting modern knowledge against the opinions of their medical precursors, as sedimented and persisting in popular belief.

## Appendix: Abernethy’s tables of digestible and indigestible foods

From John Abernethy, *The Pocket Aesculapius: Dr Abernethy’s Code of Health and Long Life, with the Cause and Cure of Indigestion*. London, James Cornish, 1856 [first edition 1820 or earlier; first edition not traced].

Each class of food is listed in order of digestibility, the easiest first. Abernethy notes ‘individual exceptions must of course occur, but they will be found only sufficient to confirm the rule’.

\* = ‘generally unsuited to the dyspeptic’

\*\* = ‘very indigestible’

### Meats

1. Mutton
2. Beef
3. Veal
4. \*Pork

'These are, generally speaking, more digestible if broiled on a gridiron, still less so if roasted, still less so if boiled, still less so if baked, still less so if fried'.

### **Poultry**

1. Fowl
2. Turkey
3. \*Duck
4. \*Goose [and all waterfowl]

### **Game**

1. Hare, hunted
2. Partridge
3. Pheasant
4. Venison
5. Grouse
6. Ptarmigan, Black
7. Hare
8. Snipe, Woodcock, etc.

### **Animal Principles**

1. Gravy
2. Gelatin
3. Fibrin
4. \*\*Fatty Matters

### **Fish**

1. Whiting
2. Haddock
3. Cod
4. Flounders and Soles
5. Lobsters and Crabs
6. Freshwater Fish in general – for example, trout
7. Turbot
8. Salmon
9. \*\*Oysters, cooked
10. \*\*Herrings and Sprats

### **Milk**

1. Whey
2. Milk, skimmed

3. Milk, unskimmed
4. Cream
5. Curd
6. Butter
7. Cheese
8. Cream cheese [but blue cheese good]

### **Grain**

1. Wheat flour
2. Rice
3. Rye
4. Oatmeal
5. Barley-meal
6. Peasemeal

### **Pot Herbs, Roots, etc.**

1. Asparagus
2. Cauliflower, the heart
3. French beans
4. Potatoes, if dry, or as it is called, mealy
5. Spinach
6. Turnips
7. Broad or Windsor Beans
8. Cabbage or Greens
9. \*Carrots
10. \*Parsnips
11. \*Peas (Dry)

### **Vegetables Eaten Uncooked**

1. Watercress
2. Mustard
3. Cress
4. Lettuce
5. Celery
6. Radish, if the acrid rind is removed
7. \*Onion
8. \*\*Cucumber

### **Fruits and Seeds**

1. Orange
2. Strawberry

3. Raspberry
4. Pineapple
5. Grape
6. Currant
7. Gooseberry
8. Peach, Nectarine, Apricot
9. Apple, Pear
10. \*Cherry
11. \*Plum
12. \*Walnut, Chestnut
13. \*Hazel-nut, Filbert
14. \*\*Melon

'The juice alone ought to be swallowed; the skin or other matters ought in most cases to be rejected. Perfectly ripe fruit, eaten in moderation, and at proper times, seldom does harm'.

## Notes

1. The *opus classicus* is of course Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1966). I was myself more influenced by the iconoclastic thinking of Marvin Harris, though his book *Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture* (1985) came out a little too late for it to be cited in the first edition of my own book.
2. Goody has commented on Elias's work in several essays; see especially *The Theft of History* (2006: chapter 6 and 154–179). For Elias's views, see especially *On the Process of Civilisation* (2012). The publication of Elias's Collected Works in 18 volumes will be completed in 2014.
3. Goody adheres to the old misapprehension, common to the high anthropological establishment in Britain, that Elias was advancing a linear and irreversible 'progress theory' of the Victorian kind, and after a good many conversations I have not succeeded in dislodging that idea. It has to be said, however, that most of the fault originally lay with Elias. In 1962, he arrived as Professor of Sociology at the University of Ghana, admitting to knowing nothing of the country – but proceeded to advocate the supersession of anthropology by sociology. This was not a strategy to endear him to old Africa hands like Jack Goody.
4. My remark reflects my scepticism towards the idealistic interpretation, dominant in Western thought for centuries, of the influence of religious belief on behaviour (see Goudsblom 2004).
5. On the expansion and reconstruction of London 'society' in the nineteenth century and the intense competition for admission to it, see Davidoff (1973).
6. Cheyne (1733) and see also Turner (1982: 254–269).
7. Of course, here Sinclair is using 'civilisation' in the emic or native sense, not in Elias's etic or technical sense.

8. According to Roger Chartier, Dominique Julia and Marie-Madeleine Compère (1976), this process of disciplining defecation and urination also took place in French schools in the eighteenth century.
9. The first edition of Abernethy's book is a mystery to me. The earliest version listed in the catalogues of the British Library, the Bodleian Library and the Library of Congress is a plagiarism dated 1829. Apart from that, the oldest version of Abernethy I was actually able to examine myself was from 1856. Yet Paris, writing in 1826, quotes from Abernethy a passage coinciding with the 1856 version; this proves that the first edition was prior to 1826. Abernethy's biographer, J.L. Thornton (*John Abernethy: A Biography* (London: Simpkin Marshall, 1953)), sheds no light on the matter – he refers to the 1829 plagiarism, but not to any earlier version, and indeed makes no allusion to the mystery. There is no evidence of a personal acquaintance between the Austen family and Abernethy, and it is much more likely that Jane Austen drew on his writings for her satirical purpose than the other way round.
10. Despite these impressive figures, Chavasse and other authors of the period would have been addressing people of the middling sort – the working class being regarded as either illiterate, too ill-tutored or simply as having a completely different habitus. The style of writing confirms this inference.
11. I recall that Norbert Elias, drawing on his own experience with manners books, advised me, when I began to study cookery books, to pay particular attention to successive revisions of the same book – often over quite extended periods of time.
12. The passage is repeated in subsequent editions. Chavasse's literary style, it may be observed, is most reminiscent of *Little Arthur's History of England*, which may help to account for his book's popularity.
13. Repeated down at least to the 1898 edition.
14. In this literature, throughout the period, children are 'he' irrespective of sex.
15. One is tempted to think that the United States is similar, but there it is more the case that the adult diet – for swathes of the population – has been infantilized.
16. Perhaps Morton meant only that nothing *negative* should ever be said about food in the presence of children but that was not how I read it in the context of her book as a whole.
17. This thought was first planted in my mind back in the 1980s by my own GP in Exeter, Professor Sir Denis Pereira Gray, later President of the Royal College of General Practitioners and Chairman of the Academy of the Medical Royal Colleges of Great Britain and Ireland.

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# 8

## Eating Out Bangladeshi-Style: Catering and Class in Diasporic East London

*Johan Pottier*

### Introduction: diaspora, catering and class

The night I conversed with Muquim Ahmed (*Café Naz*), Britain's first millionaire 'Curry King', his son was celebrating his A-level results just a few tables away. Inevitably, our conversation turned to what the future had in store.<sup>1</sup> Muquim's friend told me: 'Put this in your story, it's absolutely tragic, young Bangladeshis are not interested in becoming restaurateurs. The work is too hard'. After telling us his son wants a career in technology and computing, Muquim recalled how he used to wake every morning before six. How life had changed. Indeed, as Anne Kershen observes, today's 'ambitious young Bangladeshis are looking to enter the professions rather than work in the trades of their fathers' (Kershen 2005: 181). It seems that many never warmed to the idea that a life in catering could be professionally desirable (Dench, Gavron and Young 2006: 129–130). No matter the amount of money and status the generation of their fathers achieved, young British-Bangladeshis prefer to define their place in society outside the realm of catering.

And yet, paradoxically, the younger generation asserts itself as an increasingly confident group keen to consume foodstuffs that originate from home (*desh*), from Bangladesh. Successful professionals treat 'foods from home' as objects that can be appropriated and transformed to express and consolidate their own distinctiveness. This follows the well-known trend whereby consumption creates distinctions between different social entities (Bourdieu 1984). On the streets of London's East End, in and around Brick Lane and the Spitalfields area, a number of Bangladeshi eateries have sprung up *this century* to cater for diverse,

though overlapping social identities.<sup>2</sup> As this chapter will show, the restaurants that specialize in the Bangladeshi cuisine offer 'foods from home' to shape and reinforce class divisions within the diaspora, with 'class' referring mostly to status and occupation. While this emergent cuisine represents, to use Jack Goody's terms, 'a truly differentiated cuisine, [marking] a society that is stratified culturally as well as politically' (Goody 1982: 98), it will also become apparent that the Bangladeshi foods consumed in public have the capacity to both differentiate and integrate (see Appadurai 1981). My observations lead me to conclude that class divisions are simultaneously highlighted *and toned down* because of the close-knit character of East London's Bengali community. Class distinctions, moreover, need to be considered in conjunction with other, intersecting markers of social difference, particularly those of region of origin and gender (see also Abbots, this volume).

It is well established that South Asia's culinary cultures strive to draw and reinforce boundaries around specific social groupings (see Staples, this volume). This is done, as Caroline Osella appreciates,

both via habit and by the policing within the home of 'correct' or socially-coherent cooking styles. Cooking and eating practices draw South Asians into a distinctive regional food *habitus*, in which the taste of – for example – coconut or hilsa fish is par excellence the 'taste of home'; but also into food comfort zones of caste or denominational familiarity, which then tend to become associated with highly specific dishes.

(Osella 2008: 2)

But while caste and associated practices are important in Hindu West Bengal, where households seek to employ professed Brahmins as cooks, the situation differs in Muslim East Bengal where 'caste is not a criterion of employment though it is assumed that all [cooks] are Sunni Muslims' (Janeja 2010: 50).

On the subject of food and hierarchy in Bengal, Janeja informs us that 'Bengalis as a collectivity', as an ethnic group, are made up of 'fluid and contested networks of relations.... Alternating socialities, Indian/Bangladeshi, East/West Bengali, Hindu/Muslim, *bhadralok*/poor are elicited in the emergence [that is, in the preparation and consumption] of normal Bengali food as a nexus of intersecting claims' (2010: 162). These alternating socialities intersect. Thus, although hilsa (*ilish*) is still regarded as an index of the East Bengali identity, fish in general 'is now an increasingly significant absence in the everyday meal of the poor in Bangladesh' (2010: 18, 156). On hilsa and class, Janeja writes,

For many lower middle-class persons, it is a struggle to maintain their *bhadralok* [middle-class] façade, as indexed, for instance, by the inability to consume *hilsa* fish ‘frequently’ or as part of their everyday meal when the fish is seasonally available.... The work of food in bringing forth normality, then, is fraught with tensions and is haunted by poverty.

(2010: 62–63)

Van Schendel makes a similar point:

Bangladeshi culture must be one of the most food-centred in the world.... ‘fish and rice make a Bengali’ (*machhe bhate bangali*)... [T]his is true, at least for those who can afford to eat well. Many poor people in Bangladesh eat fish only occasionally and in small portions and meat very rarely indeed, instead adding lentils and other vegetable dishes, or just chillies to their rice.

(Van Schendel 2009: 263)

An illustration of Janeja’s central tenet that ‘food works’ is that it performs odiferous functions through which consumers can be stereotyped and thought of as desirable or undesirable. As she puts it, ‘both the food, and the people of a particular place consuming it, possess [desirable or] undesirable subjectivities’ (Janeja 2010: 94). Janeja gets this message across via vignettes that show what happens when people/foods with opposed subjectivities interact in charged social settings. The regional backdrop for such encounters, highly relevant to East London, is the perceived contrast between East and West Bengal. In popular discourses in Dhaka,

‘The West Bengalis’, with their normal everyday predilection for sweet tasting foods... are perceived by East Bengalis as ‘sweet-talking people’ who are ‘calculating’.... [In Kolkata, in turn,] ‘The East Bengalis’, with their propensity to eat chilli hot foods everyday... are perceived by West Bengalis as ‘people with fiery (hot) tempers and heightened sexual libidos’.

(2010: 93–94)

The (un)desirability of others is ‘confirmed’ by taste and smell, even within the national boundary (compare Mennell, this volume). One of Janeja’s vignettes shows the mistress of a middle-class Dhaka home to be offended by the sharp smell of the fiery *lonkar bhorta* (mashed chillies) her live-in domestics have prepared. The offensive smell ‘invades

her perceptual boundaries of normality', and hence 'respectability' (*bhadrata*), to the point where one of the servants is sent home. The dismissal is justified on the grounds that a fiery culinary disposition reveals an undesirable moral character (2010: 89–91).

Other writers too, Chitrita Banerji for example, have highlighted how food performs odiferous work. Her historical backdrop sketch on Bangladesh reinforces the point. Banerji writes that the impact of Muslim cooking in Bangladesh was initially seen mostly

among the leisured and affluent classes, especially the Nawabs who represented the Mughal empire in Bengal. But, however restricted initially, it led to the development of a Bengali Muslim cuisine which is distinctly different from the Mughal cuisine of northern India and the Nizami cuisine of Hyderabad. It is less rich and more subtle than both of them, tending to substitute yoghurt and lemon juice for the cream and solid *kheer* of other Muslim cooking. Beef and chicken were also introduced into the diet; the former a bitter bone of contention even today, the latter becoming a part of Hindu households. Onion and garlic too, became commonly used ingredients in Muslim households, even the poorest ones. By the nineteenth century, the prejudiced Hindu image of the Muslim was a character reeking of these two spices.

(Banerji 1991: 12–13)

As in Bangladesh so in East London, it makes sense not to apply too rigid a notion of class. In fact, the term *bhadrak* (middle class) is rarely used. Older migrants may distinguish between having 'an English job' (working at a known supermarket, working in a bank – both prestigious) and having 'a Bangla job' (restaurant work, working in an Asian grocery shop – less prestigious), but such distinctions belong to the world of the first-generation migrant who was not inclined to break into mainstream British society. Terms like *boro chakri* or *bhalo chakri*, which come close to the English term 'white-collar worker', and *choto chakri*, which is somewhat equivalent to 'blue-collar worker', may occasionally also be used, but such terms would never imply class solidarity. In short, to the extent that the term 'class' is useful in Bengali East London, it connotes status groups and loosely structured networks that reflect a person's occupation rather than a relationship to the means of production (see also Abbots, this volume and Staples, this volume). Janeja makes the same point for Kolkata (India) and Dhaka (Bangladesh), observing that 'Hindu and Muslim *bhadrak* or middle

classes...constitute a Weberian status group rather than a class in a Marxian sense' (2010: 30).

Goody (1982) too understood class to mean social stratification, between rulers and ruled for example and duly acknowledged the role of occupation and status. The need for a broad, flexible approach to class – using the term to denote occupation, status and membership of mobile networks – is evident also in Appadurai's characterization of India's larger cities (on small towns in India, see Staples, this volume). He noted that there are

increasing numbers of middle class families [who] find themselves in cities that harbour others like themselves, who are far from their native regions. This spatially mobile class of professionals, along with their more stable class peers in the cities and towns of India, creates a small but important class of consumers characterized by its multi-ethnic, multicaste, polyglot, and Westernized tastes.... Though this class has some very wealthy persons in it, along with some who can hardly afford to belong to it, its core consists of government servants, middle-rung professionals, owners of medium-sized businesses, and middle-rank corporate employers.

(Appadurai 1988: 6)

If 'class' becomes fuzzy when cross-cutting 'vertical' linkages are recognized, the same cannot be said about the Bangladeshi foods on offer in East London eateries. The foods being promoted there represent the cuisine of East Bengal, not West Bengal (which belongs to India), and is dominated by Muslim practices. This is unambiguously evident in the dishes on offer, even though attempts may be made not to offend Bengalis from the other side of the international border (see *Bangla Oven* below). My case studies show that another marker of distinction relates to regions within Bangladesh: the Sylhet cuisine, the cuisine from coastal Bangladesh, and that of Dhaka city. Sylhet is the district from where Bangladeshis first migrated to the United Kingdom.

## Bangladeshis in East London

With the opening of the East India Dock in August 1806, East London became the British Empire's gateway: majestic Indiamen (ships) brought 'exotic' foods like sugar, coffee, tea, rice, bananas and spices. This flourishing trade, however, carried no benefits for common people. On the contrary, by the time the first Asian seamen (*lascars*) arrived in East

London, the area had turned into a sprawling slum unprepared to welcome those *lascars* who jumped ship. Between 1804 and 1810, the number of Asian seamen rose from

471 ... to over 1,400, around 130 of which would die each year, such was the poor condition of their circumstances.... Concern about their plight led to the creation of The Society for the Protection of Asiatic Sailors in 1814, and in 1869 complaint was made to the India Office in London that there were upwards of 400 destitute Asians on the streets.

(Grove and Grove 2005: 39–40)

By the 1880s, the slums of East London were portrayed as ‘Darkest England’, their population ‘sodden with drink, steeped in vice, eaten up by every social and physical malady’ (William Booth 1890: 14–15; cited in Driver 2001: 172). And all the while, one could ‘see the food of the nation passing up the silent highway in a ceaseless procession of steamers from all parts of the world’ (White 1892: 14; cited in Driver 2001: 192). After various attempts at social and infrastructural reform failed, certain slum areas were cleared and residents moved to newly built estates on the outskirts of London.

While many left East London in the 1920s and 1930s, others continued to arrive – more Indian seamen, some chefs among them. Their arrival led to curry houses springing up on Victoria Dock Road. Often referred to as *coffee houses* or *cafés*, they served seamen a simple curry and rice. By the time the Second World War broke out, *cafés* had also opened in Commercial Street, New Road and Brick Lane. The first big push for the promotion of an Indian (and ultimately Bangladeshi) cuisine came from the brothers Bahadur, who arrived in the 1930s. It is estimated that ‘nearly all first-generation East Pakistani (now Bangladeshi) restaurateurs learned their trade from the Bahadur brothers’ (Grove and Grove 2005: 52). The interest in catering was kindled too by an increase in the Indian student population, which by 1931 had ‘risen from 100 in 1880 to 1,800’ (2005: 45). By the late 1930s, Bengali-run Indian restaurants also existed in other cities. As Jack Goody recalls from his Cambridge student days, they ‘served a standard menu of curries and pilafs of the kind that had been directed to British servicemen abroad’ (Goody 1998: 161).

Then in the 1950s and 1960s, when young people in Britain developed an interest in foreign tastes, Indian and Chinese especially, Bangladeshis arrived in even greater numbers, most of them coming from Sylhet.<sup>3</sup> These first-generation migrants were ‘mainly single men,

typically sponsored by their seafaring predecessors who were often their kinsmen or fellow villagers' (Carey 2004: 1). Being sojourners, not settlers, they came from families

who could afford to lose a breadwinner for the benefit of future rewards. It was quite common for families, or even sometimes a small village community, to pool their economic resources in order to send one or more young males to the *bidesh* [abroad]. It was a chance to acquire a job, save money and return home 'as rich men of high status'.

(Kershen 2005: 177)

Sending families often belonged to Sylhet's land-owning lineages, such as the Talukdar, who 'had enough resources at their disposal to finance the initial departure of one or several young male members to Kolkata, thus enabling the first chain migration network to *bidesh* (abroad)' (Eade and Garbin 2006: 182). There are parallels here with the move to Britain of Cantonese-speaking Chinese migrants, whose arrival was also facilitated by powerful lineage connections (Watson 1977: 186).

The arrivals from Bangladesh, then known as East Pakistan and ruled by West Pakistan, stepped in to fill the vacuum created by the Jewish working families who had moved out of Spitalfields towards the North London suburbs of Tottenham, Camden and Golders Green. They found work in Jewish- and Cypriot-owned clothing factories and workshops (Kershen 2005: 178–179). They also obtained 'poorly paid and unskilled employment' in the burgeoning leather garment workshops owned by Pakistanis (2005: 180). Unskilled or semi-skilled, these new migrants were seriously exploited.

The early 1970s witnessed a rise in the number of Sylheti (and a few Pakistani) migrants who owned cafés. The expansion, especially 'in Brick Lane and surrounding streets, [aimed] to meet the demands of single Bengali men' (Carey 2004: 2). A prime example was the *Meraz Café* in Hanbury Street. Its first owner, whose son Shamim is in charge today, had come to work in this very street in the 1960s as a clothing factory machine operator. Thinking back to his childhood, Shamim recalls the constant din of the machinery. 'The area here was factories, factories, factories. Not only garment factories, but also for welding and woodwork. And shops – electrical, groceries, welding. But not restaurants'.<sup>4</sup> When the *Meraz* opened in 1974, it catered for single men from Bengal, India and Pakistan in search of food from home; the café became their 'home from home'. Workers came for lunch, for the evening meal,

and ran tabs they paid off weekly. There was no menu, customers ate whatever was cooking. This situation continued until about the late 1980s when the garment industry collapsed. Its demise kick-started the 'Indian curry' business. Kershen says,

by the end of the 1960s there were a few Indian-run cafés and restaurants in Spitalfields. By the 1980s these had been transformed into Indian restaurants 'where the décor, cuisine, availability of alcohol and prices were specifically aimed at members of the white middle class' [see Carey 2004]. The restaurants provided jobs for those made redundant from the closure of clothing factories and workshops.

(Kershen 2005: 181)

It was from 1989/90 that 'Indian' restaurants, run mostly by Bangladeshis, began to open in Brick Lane, which until then was known for its shops. Initially a slow process, the restaurant appeal intensified after 1996 with the launch of the City Challenge Regeneration Scheme, which floated the concept of Banglatown. With support from the British Labour Party, the initiative aimed to bring business to Tower Hamlets and lift the area out of its poverty and the climate of racist violence that had marred the 1970s and 1980s (Dench et al. 2006: 50). Marginalization and racism, it seemed, could be stamped out. Despite Islamist opposition, the Banglatown initiative reached its broad objective and made Brick Lane flourish at the start of the twenty-first century. By 2003, Tower Hamlets hosted 45 restaurants and cafés, nearly half of them begun in the new millennium (Carey 2004: 3). Most were Bangladeshi-run and owned.

Catering acquired a new meaning. On its website, the *Meraz Café* conveys how the Banglatown scheme changed its clientele 'from young single factory workers hungry for traditionally cooked snacks, lunches and meals to today's multi-cultural, diverse and discerning patron ... [in search of] something more authentic'.<sup>5</sup> Manager Shamim thus aspires to balance the must-preserve memory of home cooking, literally that of his mother, with the demands brought on by a broader clientele. With the factory workers gone and affluent middle-class professionals moving into the western edge of Spitalfields (Kershen 2005: 70), the café used the regeneration project to move forward. In 2000, *Meraz Café* reopened as an *Indian restaurant* (see its website). Shamim says,

Before 1996 [when Hanbury Street closed for refurbishment] the *Meraz* would display its food on offer, much like *Gram Bangla* still

does today. After we reopened, Asian customers still predominated, but non-Asians started coming too. The latter were often professionals of European descent who worked in the city. In addition, we started seeing students from abroad. Today, my clients are about 40 per cent Asian and 60 per cent European. And of the Asians only about a third are Bengali.<sup>6</sup>

After reopening with a sober modern interior (not a hint of Bangladesh or of the café's history), *Meraz Café* introduced its first-ever menu with dishes it had served for over 20 years. But the menu listed only those dishes the European palate would find acceptable: *dall gosht* (lamb with dal); *sag gosht* (lamb with spinach); *kebab wrap* (snack); *pakora* (snack); and a few others. With time, new options were added – dishes the manager had memories of from his childhood and youth. His personal favourites included *ceena shatkora* ('beef on the bone, cooked with a citrus fruit native to Bangladesh') and *sukhna nalee sag* ('sun dried spinach, fried with garlic and coriander', a side dish), both still on the menu today. 'I remember my mum cooking these'. Shamim told me, 'they are my mum's recipes from home'. Nostalgia has played its part in the emergence of a commercial Bangladeshi cuisine in East London (Pottier 2014).

### Catering and class: eating out Bangladeshi style

The Bangladeshi culinary approach is marked by a love of fish stews; the use of parboiled rice (and dal); the use of mustard oil and seed in the preparation of sauces; the predilection for hot spices, green chillies in particular; and the ubiquitous onion, present in almost every dish. Fish stews, moreover, are celebrated for their unusual spiciness and specific flavour, the latter derived from the use of mustard oil, mustard seed and poppy seed. Within the Bengal region, compared with the culinary practices of Indian (West) Bengal, the Bangladeshi cuisine is reputedly spicier. It is also, as Banerji asserts, to be hailed for its unrivalled creativity since it excels in 'the conjunction of unexpected, unrelated elements, resulting in gustatory experiences of unprecedented delight' (2006: 84). For a treat-from-home the Bangladeshi migrant is invariably drawn to Abdul Shahid's *Gram Bangla* on Brick Lane.

### Gram Bangla

The Banglatown regeneration scheme gave Abdul Shahid, owner-manager, the impetus to revive the café concept (see above) and

offer home-style cooking. *Time Out London* (5 June 2007) has this appreciation:

The trend was started by *Gram Bangla*, which spotted a need among young Bangladeshi professionals in the UK for a short stay to study. [A local community worker said:] 'Many of these students live on their own, and they long for proper home-style cooking. Also, families from outside the area – from south London, for example, who are visiting the mosque, or friends, or shopping – all take the opportunity to eat here, too.'

In setting up the café, manager Shahid also addressed a personal need. In an early interview, he recalled the day his parents returned to Bangladesh for good.<sup>7</sup> Their departure made him realise how much he missed the fish dishes his mother used to cook. Still a bachelor at that time, who never got home from the office until late evening, Abdul Shahid knew that if he wanted fish-from-home, which, unlike meat, he could not cook himself, the only option was to visit a paternal aunt. He then realised there were others like him.

Through *Gram Bangla*, meaning 'rural village of Bangladesh', Abdul Shahid created an environment 'where Bengali people could come to eat and be themselves. The food you eat here and the atmosphere are not of Dhaka today, but of Dhaka 20 years ago. We bring the authentic food from the village'. *Gram Bangla* is a meeting place for Bangladeshis who come to Brick Lane from outside London; they come to eat and socialize. Manager Shahid describes his eatery as

a cross between a workman's café and a restaurant. My busiest days are Sundays, Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. On those days Brick Lane's restaurants are not busy, and staff have their days off. So I can say that *Gram Bangla* caters for the caterers, for the local restaurant workers when they are not at work.

And since most caterers originate from Sylhet, *Gram Bangla* is renowned for its spicy dishes.

*Gram Bangla* is not a conventional restaurant by British standards; there is no printed menu, the clientele is almost exclusively Bangladeshi and customers eat with their hands. The décor enhances the experience – there are images that speak to different diasporic generations. A charcoal drawing of a girl leaning against bamboo reminds first-generation migrants of a well-known love story and associated song; they can reminisce. There is also a set of paintings that depict

village life (fishing in the river, a floating market, etc.), and a reproduction of the Shaheed Minar, the national martyrs' monument. The evocative paintings and reproduction address the younger, UK-born generations, who may not know the *desh* (homeland) all that well. The paintings are tinged with nostalgia but are not devoid of realism. In one scene, Abdul Shahid pointed out, 'one sees by the villagers' clothing, by the intensity of the colours, who is rich and who is poor'.

Although *Gram Bangla* is a magnet for low-paid caterers, its food is not cheap, but the fish on offer is guaranteed to be from Bangladesh and will have the requisite taste. This explains the cost. *Boal* and *baga ayre*, for example, two catfish types, have a different taste when *not* originating from Bangladesh. Abdul said,

We know the difference. The *baga ayre* and *boal* I get from Bangladesh are not farmed, unlike when they originate from Myanmar [formerly Burma] or Thailand. Farmed means bigger and alters the taste. Here in London we get top quality [the biggest] *boal* and *baga ayre*, sizes you do not see in markets in Bangladesh. Such farmed catfish is cheaper, but I cannot offer it to my customers.

In a later interview, when talking about hilsa (*ilish*), Abdul said,

You can tell by the taste, smell and texture where hilsa is from. If it's from the Padma river [Chandpur district], you will know. If someone cooks Chandpur hilsa in their house, the whole village knows by the smell. And there is another thing. When you go to a shop where they sell hilsa from Burma or Thailand, you can see a difference not only in the size but also in the shape. . . . The middle of the hilsa from Chandpur is not as fat, not as wide, as when it is from Burma. In Burmese hilsa, the curve of the stomach will be wider. Also, Burmese hilsa is available through the year, but the Chandpur one is seasonal. And there is a difference in colour. Burmese hilsa has rainbow colours.<sup>8</sup>

Abdul Shahid's supplier guarantees that the fish he delivers originates from the *desh*: 'I totally trust him. I know that 90 per cent of the fish he sells is from Bangladesh, so I can trust him not to use substitutes'. In contrast to the attitude towards fish, the expectation to eat 'vegetables from home' is more relaxed. When in season at home, the vegetables served up at *Gram Bangla* will be from Bangladesh. When not in season, they can be sourced from around the globe.

Although *Gram Bangla* attracts mainly Sylheti men who work in catering, from both inside and outside London, the occasion of the Baishakhi Mela (Bangladeshi New Year) also draws more elite Bangladeshis who drop in for food that is different, or differently spiced, from what they eat at home on a daily basis. Families too have reason to frequent it. Abdul explained,

I fill the gap that our people are missing – the home cooked curry. [I am thinking of] our students who are coming over, and [of] the young people who are getting married and the wife does not know how to cook proper mum's cooking, proper Bangladeshi food. Some [male] customers come here and take food home to show their wives. There is another thing, there are foods like *shutki* [dried fish, popular in Sylhet and along the Bay of Bengal] that give off a strong smell. My youngest daughter loves *shutki*, but she does not like the smell [of the cooking]. Should we cook it, she will open all windows and switch on every electric fan in the house. But she loves the food. This happens also in other families. So I look at such scenarios and tell myself: if I can fill that little gap, give them that taste, then I have provided a service. Also, certain things are not cooked at home [in the UK].... What do you do, for example, when you like something your wife does not like? You cannot force her to cook. Not everyone likes the same fish. So by giving people a choice, my restaurant can ease domestic tensions!

The 'educational' aspect of takeaways intended to enlighten housewives was mentioned also when I interviewed other restaurateurs.

### **Kolapata**

In East London, as in Bangladesh, the perception of *desh* is not limited to the nation-state. Migrants may be 'from Sylhet', they may also originate 'from Dhaka' or a district town. Some have had a rural upbringing, others are urban and educated. *Kolapata* (meaning: Banana Leaf) opened in 2004 on the Whitechapel Road and offers a taste of the cuisine that educated/urban Bangladeshis enjoy. Young people, students and professionals go there to celebrate the food that reminds them of Dhaka and other towns and to listen to modern Bangladeshi music. There is a menu.

The ties with urban Bangladesh were much in evidence on Baishakhi Mela day 2010 when *Kolapata* ran a food stall at Weavers Field, where the parade ends, and families and friends gather for a concert. That day,

restaurant staff entertained the crowd with a song adapted from the first line of *Kana Bogi'r Cha*, a poem by Khan Mohammed Moinuddin. The opening line *Oi dekha jai Talgach* (Look! That's the Santalm Tree) was turned into *Oi dekha jai Kolapata* (Look! That's the Banana Leaf). The rap-like chanted advert went like this:

If you want to eat *tehari*, come to Kolapata  
 Everyone comes here  
 Nilkhet's *tehari* is in Kolapata  
     - [crowd:] *Tehari, tehari, tehari*  
 If you want to have *tehari*, come to Kolapata  
 Your favourite Kolapata is in London now  
*Oi see Kolapata*, beloved Kolapata  
 Kolapata! Kolapata! Kolapata!  
 Everyone say:  
     - [crowd:] Kolapata  
 Loudly:  
     - [crowd:] Kolapata  
 Everyone:  
     - [crowd:] Kolapata  
 Say the name:  
     - [crowd:] Kolapata

'Nilkhet's *tehari*' referred to Nilkhet, a place near Dhaka university where a shop, popularly known as 'Nilkhet's *tehari*', sells only *tehari*.<sup>9</sup> The song then moved on to *Kolapata*'s other urban specialities: *chotpoti* and *fusca* (light pre-dinner snacks); *kachchi biryani* (lamb on the bone with basmati rice and a korma sauce); and chop-cutlets, all hailed as 'the taste from Bangla'.<sup>10</sup>

That *Kolapata* represents urban/educated Bangladesh is clear from its menu, which lists meat dishes on a par with fish dishes. The restaurant, moreover, promotes three *biryani*s of Mughal origin. On my first visit (26 May 2009), the *biryani*s were the following: a *morog polao* (roast chicken with Bangladeshi *kalizera* rice, spiced and flavoured with saffron, served with a korma sauce); a *kachchi biryani*; and a *tehari* (beef on the bone with basmati rice, 'medium spice flavoured with saffron and served with korma sauce'). All three are relatively mild, especially when compared with the Sylhet-style dishes served at *Gram Bangla*. Their mildness reflects the fact or opinion that Mughal rule influenced the cuisine of Dhaka rather than that of rural Bangladesh, making Dhaka dishes 'less spicy and maybe not so rich in oil' (Janeja 2010: 152). A

variety of *biryanis*, *polaos* and *paratha* breads entered Bangladesh following the spread of a Muslim cuisine under Mughal rule (Banerji 1991: 13). At *Kolapata*, the *tehari* was later taken off the menu and replaced with a *bhuna khechuri* (beef on the bone, lentils and basmati rice), which is also a Friday Special.<sup>11</sup>

*Kolapata's* 'special starters' include the following: *haleem* (lentils with meat on the bone, dressed with fried onions, garlic oil, fresh coriander special herbs and masala); *aloo chop* (potato cutlet filled with shreds of sliced beef); *onion bhaji*; *onion piaji* (hard-fried onion and lentil mix, essential for breaking the fast during Ramadan); *Mughlai paratha* (wrapped bread filled with beef and egg), another Mughal introduction; *shami kebab* (lamb mince kebab); *chotpoti* and *fusca*. The range has been modified these past few years, but *haleem*, *chotpoti* and *fusca* retain their central position.

In mid-2009, there was a full range of 'special fish dishes': *rupchanda* ('whole pomfret cooked with onions, tomato, green chillies and peppers in a gravy sauce'); *king prawn kolapata* ('in the shell ... cooked with onions, green chillies in a gravy sauce'); *koi* ('Bangladeshi freshwater fish cooked with onion, tomato, green chilli in gravy sauce'); *ruhi* ('freshwater fish cooked with onion, tomato in gravy sauce'); *shorisha ilish* ('Bangladeshi fish [hilsa] cooked with mustard seeds with onion, green chilli in gravy sauce'); and *chitol* ('Bangladeshi freshwater fish cooked with onion, tomato, green chilli in gravy sauce'). The much prized *koi* (perch) and iconic *ilish* (hilsa) were said to be permanently on offer. At the time of writing however, three years on, *koi*, *ruhi* and *chitol* were no longer on offer, while *rupchanda* and *ilish* could be served in a gravy sauce or simply fried.

When I interviewed manager Bipu Chowdhury (22 October 2010), he stressed that the restaurant's identity must not be reduced to that of Dhaka: '*Kolapata* is for educated urban Bangladeshis, not necessarily people from Dhaka. The focus is on Bangladesh: out there [pointing to the Whitechapel road] is England, in here is Bangladesh'. To underscore his point about representing all of sophisticated Bangladesh, Bipu proudly showed me the *Kolapata* entry in the 2008 *Eating & Drinking Time Out* magazine, which read: 'The more modest places [that offer Bangladeshi food] are all outshone by *Kolapata*, which is the ambassador for Bangladeshi food that we've all been waiting for'.

But an urban eating place, whether in Dhaka or in East London, can only survive when the menu makes business sense. This explains why the menu evolves. By the time I interviewed Bipu, he had taken both the *tehari* (publicly praised just months earlier) and the *Mughlai paratha*

off the menu. I did not get to ask why the *tehari* was taken off, but the *paratha* was removed because it was too time-consuming to prepare. A customer told me: 'Speed is of the essence also in hotels in Bangladesh. In Dhaka, the *Mughlai paratha* is served only when the restaurant is not too busy, for instance in early evening'.

### Café Grill

The entrance to *Café Grill* is unassuming, easy to miss, but once inside, past the counter and the little banana tree, a spacious, stylish, comfortable interior awaits. In 2006, manager Nasim and his (cross-cousin) business partner bought the property, an abandoned garment factory, for two reasons. The first is that Nasim (and a brother of his) already owned the sweet shop opposite, *Madhubon* – an initiative begun in 2004 when their travel agency in Bethnal Green, which the brother still runs, had started to dip. Second, Nasim himself owned a sweet-making factory in Bethnal Green, which did well but could be more conveniently located. On purchasing the site for *Café Grill*, he had the old factory kitchen renovated as a sweet factory serving Brick Lane, the Whitechapel Road and surrounding areas.<sup>12</sup>

To test the market, the partners offered a mixture of fast food grills (to attract the white middle class), Bangladeshi curries and pre-dinner snacks. In the first six months, the grills brought in 30 per cent of the takings, curries 40 per cent and snacks 30 per cent. It soon dawned on the owners that running all three sections successfully would prove difficult. A customer survey then revealed strong support for the idea of a restaurant – not a café – specializing in Bangladeshi dishes and snacks. Particularly attractive was the idea of serving pre-dinner snacks (*shingara*, *haleem*, *chotpoti* and *Mughlai paratha*) to people who lived outside London but wished to linger for *adda*, the customary practice of talking things through with friends and business partners.<sup>13</sup> The cousins dropped the fast food grills.

While *Café Grill* kept its name, it now proudly proclaims itself to be promoting the 'Bangladeshi cuisine'. Not 'Bangladeshi and Indian', as at the nearby *Sonargaon* restaurant in Osborn Street, but only 'Bangladeshi'. Owner-manager Nasim recalls that, in 2008, 'we became the fish specialists in Brick Lane. I became interested in how young Bangladeshis relate to the foods from home. I started by offering children mildly spiced dishes and dropping the chicken and chips'. The decision as to what kind of eatery would be most attractive, and profitable, was also made in the light of what *Gram Bangla* stood for. *Gram Bangla*, immensely popular but small, did not attract the more

successful Bangladeshi entrepreneurs. So the latter became *Café Grill's* target group. Nasim said: 'I wanted the restaurant to be not only for our [Bangladeshi] people, but also upmarket, so I invested a lot to make the interior stylish, comfortable and clean. And I broadened the range of Bangladeshi dishes from around a dozen to twenty and more'. Cash-ing in on its big asset, space, *Café Grill* developed into a meeting place for political and community organizations. Today, the UK branches of Bangladesh's main political parties, that is, the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and the Awami League, use the restaurant to host politicians 'from home' and to hold press conferences. The restaurant boasts a full list of high-profile visitors.

*Café Grill* is associated too with promoting the arts, with the Dhaka International Film Festival for instance. It welcomes prominent film directors. Subhash Duta himself, who directed *Sutorang* (1964), has made an appearance. That the association with the arts is a proud one can be seen from the paintings that grace the restaurant's interior. The works are by Baish Kadir, the modern Bangladeshi painter who also helped to design the Bangla Tiger which leads the yearly Baishakhi Mela parade. In the run-up to the Mela, local community groups use *Café Grill* for their preparatory meetings. Sports personalities, too, among them champion boxer Amir Khan, appear occasionally.

Besides the groups who gather for political or community activities, *Café Grill's* main customers are entrepreneurs, mostly restaurateurs, from both inside and outside London. Customers also include professionals and, increasingly families who gather for a birthday or other social occasion. Bangladeshi/Bengali students too call and receive a 10 per cent discount – the majority are from Dhaka. Entrepreneurs and professionals often meet up during pre-dinner hours, 6–8 p.m., for strongly sweetened tea and snacks like *chana boot* (chickpeas fried with onion and spices), *piaji* (onion *bhaji*) or *chotpoti* (prepared with tamarind). Nasim said, 'They mix and match, and engage in *adda*'.

Fish and meat dishes have different connotations for manager Nasim. He stated, 'Fish brings back memories of rural Bangladesh, and, as we know, many first generation Bangladeshis who came to the UK were rural folk from Sylhet'. By contrast, 'meat dishes are more associated with town life'. Ranked highly at *Café Grill* are *ceena* (beef on the bone) and liver in a *bhuna* sauce. Fish favourites include *keski* (anchovy-like), *rupchanda* (made with onion, *bhuna* sauce, coriander and green chillies), *chitol kufta* (fish balls), *lota isa* (prawn with *lota*, that is, stem of taro) and *shorisha ilish*. The fish served up is rarely of the large variety but nearly always small fish supplied by Crown Farm/Eurofoods. Nasim agrees that

'small' means tasty and reduces the possibility that the fish originates from Myanmar. 'Our people know the taste of fish from home. They will not be fooled by tasteless imports from Myanmar'.

Customers often have a sweet at the end of their meal or during *adda*. Popular Bengali sweets, commonly prepared with milk and sugar, include *sujir halva* (semolina-based), *phirni*, *sandesh*, *kalojam*, *jilapi*, *gazor halva* (made with carrot), *rosh malai* (deep fried small *rosogollas*), carrot *barfi* and others. Sweets are considered to be Bengali, not specific to Bangladesh.

### Bangla Oven

In late 2011, *Bangla Oven*, which had opened only the previous year, completed the set of Brick Lane eateries with an exclusive Bangladeshi character. Its interior was simple. The walls were mostly bare (except for one mural); the colours – pistachio green and orangey yellow – seemed balanced; tables and chairs were austere, but with ample space in between; and the counter, not visible from the road, displayed the dishes available. I was told that young people appreciated the food counter because it was 'a Subway or perhaps McDonald's version' of the display at *Gram Bangla*, just four doors away. This touch of modernity notwithstanding, *Bangla Oven* adhered to the time-honoured café principle that what you see displayed is what is on offer.

On my first visit, in mid-December 2011, I had found the café/restaurant open, to my surprise. Only the previous week, the *London Evening Standard* had quoted manager Suraj Ali as saying he had closed down since he could not recruit a chef from Bangladesh due to the United Kingdom's tightening immigration laws.<sup>14</sup> The place was not shut, though, and had the following message (in Bengali) in the window: '£6.00 buys rice, dal, a vegetable dish and a curry'; arguably 'the best deal around' for anyone hoping to enjoy a Bangladeshi dish. This 'outrageously cheap' offer, a waiter told me, had not gone down well with the managers of nearby Bangladeshi restaurants.

For the time it stayed open, *Bangla Oven* was ever in search of an identity and a firm clientele. The same waiter (mid-thirties, from Sylhet) believed the eatery targeted third-generation Bangladeshis: 'We are aiming to attract young people in their twenties to forties; Bengalis/Bangladeshis born in this country. And both genders are welcome. We are also a family restaurant, which is why we do not serve alcohol'.<sup>15</sup> He thought the gender ratio to be 80–20 in favour of men, with women customers coming mostly from outside London. 'You will not see women here from Tower Hamlets as they would have male

relatives following them'. On my first visit, a Thursday, I saw two women friends in their thirties sharing a meal; another woman was waiting, it turned out, for two men who, when they arrived, looked like business partners; several younger men had congregated near the window; then a father came in with his two young children. The waiter elaborated, saying that third-generation customers wanted to learn about dishes from the *desh*: 'These customers know a dish or two from their homes in the UK, but they come to try new ones. They will point to what is on offer and ask "what's this one?", and then they will decide what to order. They are eager to learn about new dishes'.

When I later met chef Alamin, on a Monday, he had a somewhat different take on what *Bangla Oven* stood for.<sup>16</sup> Alamin said,

There are so many Indian restaurants here, so why not Bangladeshi ones? There is a market for our food, and the number of potential clients exceeds what *Gram Bangla* can accommodate. We are a different kind of *Gram Bangla*: our style is the same, but with different dishes and more space. The people you see here come to Brick Lane from outside London, they want to meet where it is not too crowded.

Space for meeting up – casually, privately or in bigger groups – is an important factor in the café's search for an identity.

Visiting *Bangla Oven* on different days of the week revealed how the eatery had its own rhythm with shifting emphasis as the week progresses. On a Monday I first met Alamin, the place did indeed look like the *Gram Bangla* scene but with more space. Being the beginning of the week, there were many caterers who lived and worked outside London; they had come to Brick Lane for business (sending money home, buying airline tickets, some shopping) and hung around for as long as they could. They socialized over tea and a snack or something more substantial. *Oven Bangla* metamorphosed towards the end of the week. Unlike the early part, when dishes were wide ranging and customers more numerous and working class, the selection of dishes towards the end of the week was more limited but appealed to the sophisticated palate.<sup>17</sup> On a Thursday or Friday there were always great-looking dishes on display – colourful and experimental. On one occasion, when I asked Alamin if his wife inspired him in his work as a chef, he pointed to a *taki* (fish) dish which contained big green Bangladeshi olives and turmeric. It was his wife's creation.

Although Alamin did not feel that *Bangla Oven* specifically targeted third-generation migrants, he conceded that the café still drew too

few professionals. Those who came were often solicitors or accountants who worked locally but lived some distance away. Professionals, I gathered, fell into two groups: UK-born and Bangladesh-born. It was predominantly the latter who, having spent a good part of their lives in Bangladesh, dropped in from time to time. They did so because of a craving or because they were curious about more creative dishes. The so-called Bombay Duck (a dried *loita* fish) prepared with *lota* (stem of taro) and the prawns with *uree bici* (butter bean seed) spoke to the imagination. But UK-born professionals, I was told, were more likely to have Indian friends and to frequent restaurants like *Sonargaon*, whose buffet also promotes, though is not restricted to, the Bangladeshi cuisine. Bangladeshi professionals who eat out at *Bangla Oven* included women, still a small minority, who enjoyed the café because its space offered some privacy. Women did not need to sit uncomfortably close to men.

*Bangla Oven* also welcomed group meetings. On a Monday night, by around 8.30 p.m., some 25–30 ‘locals’ would be seated at a long table for the weekly meeting of their Awami League branch. Few would be eating or drinking but some might have a tea with *shingara*, *chana boot* or *piaji*. In addition to such local-branch meetings, there were ad hoc meetings of regional associations: charities that aided destitute families in Bangladesh (e.g., with raising dowry) or that helped to fund community projects. These regional associations, mostly from Sylhet, were reputed to be good fund raisers.<sup>18</sup>

But *Bangla Oven*’s search for an identity within the cluster of Bangladeshi restaurants needed to be understood also in the context of Brick Lane competition. On the one hand, as my visits confirmed, the eatery was definitely a Bangladeshi place with Bangladeshi customers. This was signalled on the back of the takeaway menu, written in Bengali, which drew attention to two *shutki* (dried fish) items: *shidolshutkichutney* (a chutney made from dried *shidol/chitol* fish) and fried *godjar shutki* (dried bullseye snakehead fish). These items may well have an odour that is not too strong, as has been observed also of Bengali restaurants in Kolkata (Janeja 2010: 145), but they unambiguously testified to the venue’s Bangladeshi character. Conspicuous too was the adoption of an alphabet that breaks with traditional writing modes. The characters used in the leaflet, one customer clarified, are ‘the Bangla spelling of the Bengali alphabet’, a script gaining ascendancy in Bangladesh. On the other hand, crafting an identity was a challenge that took place within Brick Lane’s fiercely competitive climate. *Bangla Oven* was not immune to competition. In late 2012, under pressure from ‘really cheap’ Bangladeshi cuisine eateries that had sprung up during the Olympic

summer, it began to target Bangladeshi *families* by offering them Indian options (Tandoori chicken, mixed grills, shish kebab, etc.) alongside its Bangladeshi specialities.<sup>19</sup> The two-pronged approach aimed to satisfy the tastes of Bangladeshis young and old and would (hopefully) win over youngsters not familiar with the cuisine of the homeland. Chef Alamin also hoped that the inclusion of 'an Indian menu', clearly advertised in the café window on its relaunch (November 2012), would draw in a more cosmopolitan clientele to help ensure survival. It did not work. *Bangla Oven* closed in early 2013; a generic 'Indian restaurant' quickly took its place.

## Conclusions

An initial but ultimately incomplete conclusion might be that straightforward class labels apply to each of the eateries described. Thus *Gram Bangla*, the iconic Sylheti establishment, could have the 'working class' – caterers of low status, mostly – as its focal point, while *Café Grill* could be said to attract entrepreneurs – restaurant owners, cultural performers and political activists – and occasionally young professionals and students. *Bangla Oven*, the ill-fated newcomer hungry for an identity and a solid clientele, would then stand in-between: quite like *Gram Bangla* in some respects (though with more space) but aiming to attract more adventurous clients towards the end of the week. By contrast, *Kolapata* could be said to evoke a distinctly urban atmosphere, that of Dhaka, where young professionals and students order from a menu and listen to the latest in modern Bangladeshi music. Within its exclusivity, however, *Kolapata* too wishes to embrace all sophisticated Bangladeshis.

Warning against simplistic labelling, the observations made in this chapter confirm that a Weberian approach to class is to be preferred over viewing class in a Marxian sense. In London, as in Bengal, an approach that recognizes 'status groups' and 'interest groups' is eminently appropriate. For the eateries visited, it makes sense to think in terms of interest groups (political parties, regional associations) and status groups (caterers vs. restaurateurs vs. educated professionals); all four venues attracting or aspiring to attract different clienteles. Class in a Marxian sense does exist in East London, even within extended families, but its manifestation in public is toned down because of the nature of the migration process, which spins 'a web of links between groups of people' and because of the close-knit character of the Bengali community, which is 'clustered into specific locations within Tower Hamlets'

(Gardner 2002: 121–122). Class contours, moreover, are blurred due to the importance of networks and region. This is particularly true of people who originate from Sylhet, for whom *Gram Bangla* is a beacon, and of professionals, who constitute a more varied group. Thus professionals born in the United Kingdom are less likely to frequent the eateries that offer an exclusively Bangladeshi cuisine, while professionals born in Bangladesh find them more attractive, especially if they have no family in London.

The above conclusions, with their emphasis on occupation and status (and region), are an improvement on the approach that narrowly links class to the means of production, yet they still fail to appreciate, in the context of East London, the myriad ways in which class intersects with other variables such as gender and notions of Britishness. Although outside the scope of this chapter, it certainly is relevant that articulations of Britishness transcend class and often turn into hyphenated labels: such as British-Bangladeshi, British-Asian or British-Muslim (see Garbin 2005: 77). Equally significant and again challenging a simplistic approach to class is the gendered nature of the diasporic experience – the latter offering constraints and opportunities to reinforce or loosen gender subordination (see Clifford 1994: 313–314). For those who eat out Bangladeshi-style, this is most forcefully expressed in the way professional women appreciate flexible spatial arrangements. Bangladeshi women who have responded positively to the opportunities and demands of diasporic life are drawn to eateries whose spatial set-up facilitates the privacy needed for a professional encounter. Space is a central organizing concept.

Most striking, however, but a reflection of the close-knit nature of the Bengali community is that each of the eateries described aims to be both unique and inclusive. Each cultivates a distinct identity and is wary of what competitors are up to, yet each one also gives out signals to let it be known that the wider Bangladeshi community and even all of Bengal are welcome. Food, as Appadurai demonstrated in his seminal paper on gastro-politics, continues to have the capacity to both differentiate and integrate (1981: 494). In the competitive climate of fêted Banglatown, these diametrically opposed functions are in full force: every restaurateur wishes to attract a distinct group of Bangladeshi customers but not at the expense of openly wanting to alienate ‘other’ Bengalis. One reason for this semblance of homogeneity may be sought in the solidarity movement of the late 1970s and 1980s when East London’s Bengali immigrants united to counter the racist attacks to which they were subjected.

## Notes

1. Interview at *Café Naz*, Brick Lane, 19 September 2009. 'A levels' are the public examinations taken around the age of 18 on completing schooling.
2. Spitalfields is a former parish within the Borough of Tower Hamlets, which includes the pre-1965 Boroughs of Bethnal Green, Poplar and Stepney. It is an area of East London where successive waves of migrants – and refugees – have settled, from the Huguenots in the seventeenth century, Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and Bangladeshi and other South Asian migrants in the late twentieth century. Unlike earlier periods when relatively few Londoners would venture into the area, Spitalfields is now *fêted* worldwide for its distinct sense of history, specialized shopping, good food and stylish 'exotic' cooking.
3. The exponential rise of the high street Indian restaurant was caused, in part, by the rising number of young people who, especially in the 1960s, lived away from home for the first time (see Highmore 2009: 181).
4. Interview, 13 October 2011.
5. [www.themeraz.co.uk](http://www.themeraz.co.uk), accessed 14 October 2011.
6. Interview, 13 October 2011.
7. Interview, 13 February 2009.
8. Interview, 31 October 2011.
9. *Tehari* = beef on the bone and basmati rice, spiced and flavoured with saffron and served with a *korma* sauce.
10. *Chotpoti* = snack made with white peas and different spices, dressed with egg, potato and crunchy *fusca*; *fusca* = a popular snack structured like an urchin shell with the top sliced off. Chop and cutlet are misnomers derived from English (Banerji 1991: 14).
11. See [www.kolapata.co.uk](http://www.kolapata.co.uk), accessed on 22 November 2012.
12. Interviews on 17 October 2011 and 25 January 2012.
13. The samosa-like *shingaras* are 'triangular creations of a thin shell enclosing seasoned, fried vegetables' (Banerji 1991: 128).
14. *London Evening Standard*, 7 December 2011.
15. Interview, 15 December 2011.
16. Interview, 12 March 2012. The day of the week is significant since caterers have their days off early on in the week (see *Gram Bangla* section above).
17. While end-of-week options were also available early on in the week, the wider range included fish options like *hilsa* (curry; fried; hilsa egg with beans), *rupchanda* (curry), *boal* (curry) and some home-made fish chutneys.
18. Region, in this case, is at the level of the Union, an administrative sector between Village and Thana. Bangladesh has 64 Districts and over 400 Thanas. A Thana has several unions; a union has several villages.
19. Visit and interview with chef Alamin, 23 November 2012.

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# 9

## The Taste for Milk in Modern China (1865–1937)

*Françoise Sabban*

The year 2013 will be remembered as the date when sales were restricted to two packs of infant formula per customer in European supermarkets as a result of the severe depletion of stocks caused by bulk buying by mainly Chinese tourists to satisfy the needs of parents who wanted Western brands for their babies (BBC News 2013). This trend was explained as distrust among Chinese citizens of domestically produced infant formula following the melamine crisis of the autumn of 2008 when, according to Chinese official statistics, the addition of this chemical to milk for babies poisoned about 300,000 of them and killed at least six (Gong and Jackson 2012).

The immediate causes behind the recent Chinese ‘craze’ for European milk powder are obviously connected to the melamine scandal. But it is also a distant echo of the gradual emergence of a new consumption habit that began in the 1920s among urban Chinese. Hence, this crisis, the effects of which even reached Europe, can also be examined from a wider historical and anthropological perspective. So doing is one of the objectives of this chapter, which attempts to shed some light on the conditions of the birth of a new dairying and milk sector and the ensuing consumption patterns in modern China. At that time, China was – in the words of Jack Goody (1982: 175–190) – already part of a ‘world system’: a global market of milk and more so of tinned (canned) milk (powdered and condensed) newly invented by a thriving industry and, from the mid-nineteenth century, sold worldwide with enormous success. A second objective of this chapter is to analyse how and to what extent this phenomenon influenced Chinese daily life. The third objective is to stress the specific role played by women in the diffusion of the peculiar taste for milk powder that has developed among Chinese consumers.

## To milk or not to milk

Like other countries in East and Southeast Asia, China was not considered a milk-producing region. Up to the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the economic reform, its milk production was unimportant. The classic historiography contains several explanations for this phenomenon. First, from antiquity there was the quasi-absence of husbandry in the Chinese agricultural system, ancient farming having concentrated on grain cultivation. The second reason was Chinese lactophobia, generally attributed to lactose intolerance, since it was supposed that Chinese like other Asian people were unable to digest milk after childhood (McCracken 1971: 479–517; Anderson and Anderson 1979: 340–341; Huang 2002: 809–819; Sabban 1986: 31–35; 2011).

With the economic reforms, a great change has taken place in China. Today it is either the third- or the fourth largest producer of milk in the world, and its average annual consumption of milk has risen from 1 kg per capita at the end of the 1970s to 4.5 kg in 1987 and to more than 28 since 2007 (FAO 2012: 7; Fuller et al. 2006: 210; Wiley 2011: 13).<sup>1</sup> Milk consumption has become a topical issue in China today, accentuated when world public opinion was alerted to the ‘melamine crisis’ in 2008. What has happened? It seems that a new agricultural system has been developed, that dairy units were created and that milk and dairy products are no longer ‘distasteful to the most true Chinese’, contrary to what anthropologist and sinologist Francesca Bray wrote in 1984. This would also imply that lactose intolerance does not explain the so-called historical rejection of milk by the Chinese population.<sup>2</sup> That the Chinese now consume milk was not easily predictable, for many populations without traditional dairy husbandry manage without either milk or dairy products (Bernot 1988: 101). And as Orland says, ‘no mammals except humans, and of these only a certain part of the world population, consumes milk after the lactation period’ (2007: 154). Contrary to widespread belief, ‘sweet fresh cow’s milk began its real life as an American food in the mid-nineteenth century, primarily as a breast milk substitute for infants and a beverage for weaned children ...’ (DuPuis 2002: 4–5). For centuries, drinking fresh milk had been a very minor aspect of the human diet in Europe even for children, except in farming areas (Guillaume 2003; Fanica 2008; Orland 2007; Atkins 2010).

Many factors contributed to the changing European conceptions about milk. Perhaps one of the most important was a complete reversal of medical discourse on the nature of milk with the birth of the experimental nutritional sciences in the 1830s and 1840s. Certainly,

new industrial processes also changed the very nature of milk. Refrigeration aided its preservation, delaying putrefaction thus permitting wider distribution – a diffusion that was facilitated by the development of transport in Western countries. Furthermore, since the invention of pasteurization in 1865 and Ultra Heat Treatment sterilization in the 1960s (adding several months' shelf life), it is now possible to drink liquid 'fresh' milk almost everywhere and at any time. Milk has become a common food for children and adults.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that even though drinking liquid milk was rare until the mid-nineteenth century, eating dairy products has long been common in many countries, especially in Europe where various cheese traditions are well attested and also elsewhere in the world where curds, yogurt and butter have been part of the regular diet, as in North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, Central Asia and India.

As for China, milk and milk products have never been consumed in great quantities or on a large scale during its history. Milk was a rare product, mainly considered a medicine and sometimes a tonic food for children, aged people or sick persons (Cooper and Sivin 1973: 227–234). It was also a precious ingredient for cooking refined dishes for the privileged few (Sabban 1986: 48–50; Wang Suzie 2011: 213) under the Song (960–1279), Yuan (1271–1368) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties and especially at the Qing (1644–1911) court where an imperial dairy existed to prepare fermented milk, butter and other delicacies from herds kept in North China meadows for the exclusive supply of the emperor and his retinue (Mote 1979: 206; Spence 1979: 281). In addition, milk had been considered a typical barbarian food that, along with meat, was the mainstay of the diet for several populations living on the margins of China and with whom interactions had been limited and codified.

This absence of ordinary milk consumption by the Chinese had long been a stereotype in Western travelogues, chiefly at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Occasionally, their authors were good observers, who noted features that surprised them. Some witnesses observed that although cow's milk was not considered a common food, it was not unknown and, furthermore, was used for specific purposes. The British Archdeacon of Hong Kong J.H. Gray, for example, noted that some milk dainties made for the pleasure of the inhabitants of Canton were taken in summer in special Cow Milk Saloons (1878: 154). This is consistent with recipes for those refined dishes found in some late eighteenth century literary sources and even earlier (Sabban 1986: 49). It is also consistent with the likely influence on Beijing inhabitants of the food habits of the Qing emperors of

Manchu origin, who popularized the use of milk and dairy products as delicious, special treats. In the Chinese capital, in addition to the traditional yogurt sold everywhere one can nowadays taste this food heritage from the Qing court in dairy shops. These shops are a kind of milk bar and sell a variety of specialties such as yogurt (*suannai* 酸奶), milk rolls (*naijuan* 奶卷), fermented milk (*nailao* 奶酪) and custard (*danhuang nailao* 蛋黄奶酪).

## Dairying in Chinese cities

In spite of this unfavourable situation for a large system of dairying in China, once foreigners settled in treaty ports from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the birth of a dairy industry is evident in several Chinese cities like Harbin, Beijing and Shanghai – the most important centres for dairying. The discussion is limited to Shanghai where dairy activity was the most extensive: in the 1930s, it produced almost half the total Chinese milk production (Wu Xinfu 1939: 13).

### The birth of a dairy industry in Shanghai<sup>3</sup>

The first known, written testimonies found in the Shanghai Municipal Archives on an interest in milk production appeared in 1865.<sup>4</sup> At that time, the provision of fresh cow's milk for infants was a great worry among foreigners living in Chinese treaty ports (Thomson 1909: 53–54), but of no concern to the Chinese. So, in the 1860s, some Chinese farmers owning cows (Chinese 'yellow' cows) or buffalos began to milk them in the streets of the town to sell milk directly to foreigners on the spot (Wang and Chen 1984: 2). This response to an urgent request constituted the embryo of the dairy industry of Shanghai.

These first steps towards a very limited dairy activity were specially designed for foreign customers who had to wait for the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 to be able to import European breeds of cattle able to produce better quality milk in greater quantities. At the time troops stationed in Shanghai, the monasteries and the wealthy foreign families were all raising one or two cows in their gardens for their own use. This lasted until about 1879 when milk began to be sold in beer bottles. This trade in milk marked the birth of a real dairy industry in Shanghai, and it was dominated by foreign interests (Wang and Chen 1984: 2). However, the Shanghai dairy sector finally evolved from a monopoly of foreign capital into a progressive inflow of capital by native entrepreneurs.

The development of this industry has been very complex and difficult, especially for Chinese entrepreneurship (Chen Baisheng 1999: 162–170;

Glosser 1999). With the development of dairy farming came the spread of the highly contagious rinderpest, endemic in every farming country worldwide at the time. Furthermore, milk production had to be regulated to meet hygiene standards fixed by the Hygiene Office of the Shanghai Municipal Council.<sup>5</sup> All of these problems already existed in other dairy-producing countries and cities, but in China they partially inhibited the growth of the industry until Pasteur's revolution finally reached that country in around 1923 (Shanghai diqu 2006).

Nevertheless, the developing domestic Chinese dairy industry reached its peak in the 1930s as a result of the actions of several Chinese men who took the business very seriously. According to statistical data, in 1931, the fresh milk market was shared equally between Chinese and foreign businessmen (Wang and Chen 1984: 5), with production targeted at both foreign and Chinese consumers. On the eve of the Sino-Japanese War in 1936, the well-known Chinese Kedi farm, among others, sold a total of about 5000 pounds of fresh milk a day on contract, 3500 pounds of which went to Chinese people (Wang and Chen 1984: 9–10). These figures clearly demonstrate that in the 1930s, production of milk by native Chinese entrepreneurs corresponded to the consumption of milk by a growing number of Chinese consumers.

### **Drinking fresh milk: a consumption habit for a happy few**

Although milk production had been growing, only about 25 per cent of the total produced in the city was drunk by Chinese, according to the figures recorded in 1935 by You Huaigao, owner of the famous Liberty Dairy and one of the most active dairymen at that time in Shanghai (Glosser 2003: 238 n73). For this visionary boss, the reckoning was not optimistic. He attributed the failure of his attempts to convince Chinese customers to drink more milk to the general ignorance of the population. And he claimed that China had 'to face two major problems today. One is that 90 per cent of the population is illiterate. The other is that 80 per cent drinks no milk' (Glosser 2003: 154).

It seems that perhaps there was another important reason alluded to by You Huaigao for his lack of success: milk, in 1935, provided by Liberty Dairy to the happy few who contracted to have daily deliveries to their front door was still very expensive, and common people could not afford it (Glosser 1999: 212; 2003: 142). Even those who were most convinced of the benefit of drinking milk, like Wu Xinfu, probably a veterinary surgeon, had to admit that 'cow's milk had become an aristocratic beverage, and that ordinary people could not drink it on a regular basis' (Wu Xinfu 1939: 12).<sup>6</sup>

And yet, in his first book, dated 1937, Wu Xinfu – a prolific author on milk and various milk products – was hopeful. He stated that ‘those who drink milk are few but, recently, due to a Western influence and new scientific knowledge, more and more inhabitants of Chinese cities are used to it’ (1937: 3–4), and he insisted on saying that ‘there must be milk for each person to drink. We do not want to let it become (only) a food supplement for rich people!’ (Glosser 1999: 209; Wu Xinfu 1937: author’s preface).<sup>7</sup> But according to a 1929 survey of food consumption among 305 Shanghai workers’ families, less than 10 per cent included milk in their diet (Wang Suzie 2011: 222).<sup>8</sup>

Those few urbanites who drank milk every day, and who by doing so seemed simply to live like their Western contemporaries in the United States, were only the visible part of an iceberg. As a new item in the Chinese way of life, the milk consumption phenomenon in Shanghai and elsewhere in China at that critical period – between the end of nineteenth century and the first decades of twentieth century – can, in a way, be seen as part of the global transformations that occurred in the country; milk drinking has to be integrated in the historical context of the great changes that were to reach and modify Chinese society until the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949.

### **Milk in the modernization process of Chinese society**

The profound transition – often an assimilated Westernization – that occurred in China was propelled at the end of the Qing dynasty by an enlightened elite and later continued under the Republic by a younger intelligentsia. If milk was of minor importance in these developments, it was not without symbolic significance, as Glosser (1999) outlined in her study of the milk industry in Shanghai under Japanese occupation. Milk consumption at that time was one of the imported practices from the West that went beyond the simple adoption of a new commodity. As in the United States, its Chinese supporters considered milk a perfect food for human beings. And drinking milk was seen altogether as a scientific habit, a sign of modernity and a necessary path towards acquiring strength through perfect health. ‘Dairy entrepreneurs presented milk-drinking as the key to China’s success in the evolutionary struggle to survive’ (Glosser 1999: 209).

Nevertheless, before becoming an idealized item that would be accepted unconditionally, milk had first to be produced and considered a ‘normal’ food. The process of its adoption or the expressed desire to make it part of the diet can be viewed as factors contributing to

several changes: First, the improvement of agriculture through husbandry emerged as an important topic for new specialists. Second, hygienic milk production became linked to the beautifying of cities. Third, there was a growing view that the Chinese diet needed to be improved.

### **Husbandry: a new concern**

Apart from some peripheral areas, bovines were considered unimportant as a source of meat or milk, being used in the Chinese agricultural system based exclusively on grain production primarily as draught animals (Buck 1937: 6). Furthermore, agriculture had generally been considered a peasant occupation based on routine procedures that did not merit being questioned. Things began to change when the vast awareness programme of the Late Qing Reform was launched under government impetus by high-ranking scholars who wanted to save and strengthen their country through mastering Western science and technology, adopting the formula 'Western substance/Chinese application' (*xiti zhongyong* 西體中用). Some of them assumed that agriculture as a learned subject had to be integrated into the curriculum of the schools newly established under educational reform (Bastid 1971: 28).

A proposal for creating a Japanese inspired dairy industry was even made to the Qing Court – the beginnings of a dairy industry in Hokkaido under the guidance of American specialists can be traced to the mid-nineteenth century (Xie Chengxia 1985: 101; Glosser 1999: 211 n10). This was the initiative of one reformer – the influential scholar Luo Zhenyu (1866–1940), well known as a philologist, epigraphist and antiquarian and founder of a *Society for Agriculture* and a *Journal of Agriculture* in 1897 in Shanghai (Bastid 1971: 52–54; Sabban 1996: 54–57). But his attempts were totally ignored by the Qing government. So he gave up promoting milk.<sup>9</sup> But later, his *Journal of Agriculture* published several articles on the topic describing foreign enterprises. The earliest to address the issue of milk in China as a new field in agriculture, these texts paved the way for the future.

Nevertheless, without concrete knowledge of dairy practices as a professional and commercial activity promoting milk drinking and achieving the first reformers' ideal objectives would have been impossible. This was made possible from 1915 onwards and especially in the 1920s when the dairy industry, still dominated by foreign businessmen, began to gain economic importance in treaty ports, especially in Shanghai. These promising beginnings have to be matched with the progressive interest attested for in husbandry and dairy farms in the educational programmes in various teaching institutions at that

time, especially in foreign Christian and missionary educational circles (Fenn 1976: 145–150) and also in some Chinese universities. Moreover, a huge number of texts including more than a hundred texts on agriculture and agronomy had already been translated into Chinese from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (Tsien 1954: 327).

In 1922, a College of Agriculture was created at the Canton Christian College (Wang 2007: 40), and dairy production was an important subject including both theoretical and practical classes. A model dairy was installed at the college, and the students had to learn how to raise cattle and to produce milk to supply the needs of the community (Canton Christian College 1922–1923: 51).<sup>10</sup> Generally speaking, the American faculty and staff of the College seemed to be perfectly aware of the needs of Chinese agriculture at that time and especially of the milk problem in China. In 1911, G.W. Groff – who became later Dean and General Director of the College of Agriculture – had already written a report on Agricultural development of China saying that the country ‘has been chiefly lacking in the domestication of animals’. And he was convinced that ‘the use of milk would greatly improve living conditions both among natives and foreigners’ (Groff 1911: 32).

As in Canton, experimental dairy stations were established under foreign expertise at Peking Yenching University in 1919 and in Sichuan in the 1920s (Fenn 1976: 147–148). Moreover, other initiatives for creating dairies emerged from Chinese universities: the veterinarian Yu Zhenyong (1890–1962), a professor at Qinghua university, founded the famous Beijing Model Dairy in 1922 (Baiké Baidu; Jin Shangzhong 1936: 20) and a little later, another professor from Southeast University in Nanking created the Drum-tower Dairy, on which the dairy of the National Central University was based (Xie Chengxia 1985: 101).

### **Men and milk: a new generation**

The American agronomists who looked at the Chinese agricultural situation were convinced that the lack of husbandry and absence of dairying in China were real problems not only for a sound agrarian system but also for a balanced diet. A generation of young Chinese intellectuals, who were part of the urban elite of Chinese cities, shared their views. A number of them who had received a university education abroad (Bergère et al. 1985: 901–923) were well aware of the American way of life and the ordinary use of milk in Western countries. Those who graduated as agriculturists or veterinarians largely contributed to the development of cattle rearing, breeding and the invention of new treatments against epizootics and rinderpests. The most emblematic

example of this trend is perhaps Cai Wuji (1898–1980), one of the sons of Cai Yuanpei – the famous intellectual, educator and reformer of modern China – and the head of Peking university. Cai Wuji graduated in France in 1919 as an agricultural engineer and then as a veterinarian. When he returned to Shanghai, he founded a veterinarian dispensary and then held various high positions as responsible for the city government for veterinarian control and agricultural product inspection (Cai Yinming 2005: 1).

In Chinese agricultural circles, dairy production became an important subject of study and research in the 1920s. And from then until the 1940s, milk had its own Chinese specialists – authors of technical books aimed at diffusing an important body of knowledge. As early as 1917, the polymath Zou Dejin published a little book, *The Know-How to Make Agricultural Products*, in the popular encyclopaedia of 1010 titles in 2000 volumes of The Commercial Press of Shanghai (Drège 1978: 53–58). Its wide range of interests had to encompass this kind of practical book, dedicated to recipes for ‘subsidiary’ agricultural products including food preserves, wines, tobacco, combustibles, cosmetics and, of course, dairy products (Zou Dejin 1970 [1917]: 90–96).<sup>11</sup>

While Zou Dejin cannot be considered a ‘dairy specialist’, his book shows the success of this practical knowledge about a product that was still new at that time. Later on other authors who were more learned on the subject published several technical books on dairy matters. Perhaps the most representative was Xu Fuqi,<sup>12</sup> who published prolifically on milk. He thought that it was necessary to provide serious scientific information about milk because of its new popularity in Chinese cities. He advised that people should know which kinds of animals milk cattle are and should understand the physiological production of milk, its components and the benefits of fermented milk, butter, cream, ice-cream and cheese. His book was clearly addressed not only to agriculturists but also to ordinary families, as he claims in his introduction: ‘if my book could be a kind of reference guide to families and somehow an instruction monitor to milk specialists my wishes would be fulfilled’ (Xu Fuqi 1929: introduction).

In business circles, too, a notable like You Huaigao, the boss of Liberty Farm, was a cultivated and smart spokesman. You was a Cornell University agriculture graduate, who returned to China in 1913, creating his company in 1920 (Yuan Chi 1927: 1). As a student, he had been completely seduced by the American way of life and also greatly impressed by the harmonious atmosphere of one of his friend’s families. Furthermore, he had been wholly convinced that milk was the ‘perfect healthy

food', as DuPuis (2002) puts it. In addition to his production activities, he founded a free, weekly magazine in Shanghai for his customers, disseminating his ideas and knowledge about 'family reform, economic rationalization, improved nutrition, hygiene and wholesome habits', including the health benefits of daily milk consumption (Glosser 2003: 140). He was not only a businessman eager to make money but also a practical reformer who was deeply convinced that the consumption of milk could change his own society. But as publisher of a dairy magazine, You Huaigao was not the first to promote milk, but heir to modern Western ideas that had circulated in Chinese urban society for more than two decades. Before 1920, the chapter on milk in Zou Dejin's book, full of English words and photographs of foreign tools and machines obviously inspired by American or British sources, illustrates the intermingling of Western ideas and Chinese views of a new modern way of life that already included a place to milk consumption.

### **Milk as a matter of hygienic concern**

Though the authors of these texts were mainly interested in the production and promotion of milk, they nevertheless also paid attention to the importance of milk cleanliness, sometimes giving advice on hygienic procedures and warning of possible adulteration unless appropriate measures were taken. Milk was not easy to produce, and it required special care – a matter of great concern for municipal authorities who succeeded in guaranteeing its cleanliness through hygiene regulations. It is true that in the wave of modernity that swept in Chinese cities, the hygiene of markets, butchering, manufactured food and, of course, milk was their core concern. This Chinese hygienic modernity, to adopt Rogaski's terminology (2004), was first promoted in the foreign settlements of the treaty ports of China – viewed by enlightened Chinese as an opportunity to modernize China, which they considered a precondition for strengthening the country (Li Zhongping 2010: 111–112). For example, milk hygiene was taken very seriously by the Shanghai Municipal Council of the Shanghai International Settlement, and from 1923 stricter regulations were enacted to control its sanitary production and trade.

The hygienic production of milk was such a concern that the 1920 *Guide of Shanghai* dedicated a whole chapter to the hygienic regulations concerning small Chinese milk farms called *niunaipeng* 牛奶棚. Known for their insalubrious conditions, these workshops were under strict supervision by the Hygiene Office of the Shanghai Municipal Council. A list of 15 articles regulated the organization of hygienic milk production and

enumerated their basic necessary requirements (Shangwu yinshuguan bianyi 1920: 39).

In 1924, opening a dairy unit required a milk production licence, and a distinction between grade A milk and grade B milk was introduced to protect consumers and ensure the hygiene and quality of marketed milk (Wang and Chen 1984). Fraud was widespread with milk sold outside foreign settlements often being adulterated (Lu Wenxue 1999: 75). Despite such illegal activity, pure milk represented the very embodiment of a Western conception of hygiene, which finally was accepted and assimilated by the average Chinese milk producer.

### **Chinese diet in question: a need for milk and more animal products**

At the very beginning of the twentieth century, the concern for hygiene – understood as a Western good habit to be imitated – had also been raised by some authors when speaking about the way the Chinese ate. They focused on the risk of contagion through the manner of eating that entails sharing plates and using personal chopsticks to serve oneself out of the common dish (Zou Zhenhuan 2007: 147–148). These statements were part of a general doubt cast over the traditional Chinese diet, which was suspected of being insufficiently nourishing. A common opinion was that in comparison with the West, the ordinary Chinese diet was genuinely inadequate for maintaining health because it lacked animal products, especially beef and cow's milk (Wang 2011: 215; on animal foods in Chinese diets see also Watson, this volume). But another suggestion lay behind this statement that was clearly exposed by the intellectual Xu Ke<sup>13</sup> when he made a direct connection between the state of a country, weak or strong, and its inhabitants' health. This kind of argument was later developed to support the necessity for improving the 'physical quality' of the Chinese people, resulting in a eugenics discourse whose echoes lasted long (Dikötter 1992). As Lean summarizes, 'at this time the individual body was clearly being identified as the microcosm of the nation. Individual health was rendered as crucial to national strength' (1995: 77).

The conviction that a meat-based diet is superior to one based only on grain was clearly inspired by American outlooks and new nutrition scientific knowledge, yet in the early decades of the twentieth century, it was disseminated throughout China. A few more years were required before newspapers and magazines began publishing more scientific and informative reports and advertisements of milk products. Even if some nutritional knowledge from the West on milk composition and the nutritional value of food had already been assimilated

through some articles and texts translated into Chinese as early as 1918 (Schneider 2011: 43; Li Zhongping 2010: 108 n16),<sup>14</sup> from 1922 onwards the promotional texts were explicitly oriented to a new medical perspective: comparing milk and its nutritional properties with other food products – its composition analysed in terms that came from Western sources – that is, identifying its main components as proteins, vitamins, lipids, and so on. However, the Chinese people had to wait until 1929 to obtain sound scientific nutritional information, which they received with the publication of *Outline on Nutrition*, a book by Wu Xian ([Wu Hsien] 1893–1959) – an outstanding Chinese chemist and nutritionist – who later became famous as the ‘giant of Chinese chemistry’ spending his career in the United States from 1947 (Reardon-Anderson 2003: 140–148; Jiang Lingnan 2012: 105).

Wu Xian systematically compared Chinese and Western (American) diets to show that the Chinese diet lacked volume (calories) and several important nutritional elements like protein, lipids, minerals, carbohydrates and vitamins that are found in meat, milk, eggs and vegetables – the foods very seldom eaten by the majority of Chinese. According to him, this almost vegetarian diet explained why the Chinese generally were physically smaller and feebler than Westerners. To demonstrate his case, he conducted an experiment on rats, some of which were fed in the same way as the Chinese and compared with others given Western foods (Wu Xian [1929]1947: 99–110).

Wu Xian was aware of the actual variation in the composition of the Chinese diet in different segments of the population. He stated that the ‘peasantry represents 80 per cent of the Chinese population and urban citizens only 20 per cent’ (Wu Xian [1929]1947: 87), indicating that the majority of the Chinese population was poor and insufficiently nourished.<sup>15</sup> His assessments were consistent with surveys performed by the American economist J.L. Buck’s team, who published in 1937 the results in his famous book, *Land Utilization in China*, in which he explained that the Chinese agricultural system did not permit raising milk cattle because ‘the dense population in China necessitates the production of the greatest amount of food possible per unit of land’ (Buck 1937: 245). And even if the need for milk was great, especially for children and mothers, Buck could only observe that ‘land devoted to grains or grains and tubers produces between six and seven times as much food energy as land raising dairy cows’ (257). Having understood these constraints, Wu Xian tried to propose concrete advice and measures that could be easily applied in Chinese rural areas. In addition to saying that leguminous plants and soya curds were good purveyors of protein and

calcium and that whole grains were more nourishing than polished rice or white flour, he added that raising a sheep or a goat to obtain some milk everyday was much more economical and easier than raising a cow. That was a possible solution, sheep or goat milk being very good foods, especially for children, and according to him, they were as rich as cow's milk (Wu Xian [1929]1947: 113).<sup>16</sup> It may be surprising that Wu Xian did not recommend drinking soyabean liquid extract (*doujiang* 豆浆), which was considered a healthy product and which furthermore would have been easier and cheaper to produce by the peasants. Only some foreign experts were convinced of the nutritional properties of that beverage (Fu 2013). Some production plants set up later in an attempt to promote consumption renamed it soyabean milk (*douru* 豆乳). But contrary to expectations, they were unsuccessful (Wang 2011: 230–234).

The main concern for both Wu Xian and Buck were young rural children who, according to their findings, lacked the milk in childhood needed to grow to a satisfactory adult size. If Wu Xian bemoaned the lack of milk for peasant children, urban infants and babies were the objects of great interest at about the same period, as evident in newspaper advertisements and popular magazines. These dealt with diet and, specifically, the kind of milk they were or were not given. Strictly speaking, their mothers attracted most attention as consumers and purveyors of food to their children.

### **New women, milk, and motherhood**

From about 1910 to 1915 onwards, milk advertisements had become common in several journals and magazines, like *Funü zazhi*, *The Ladies' Journal*, one of the famous ten magazines published by The Commercial Press at that time, or the daily journal *Shenbao*. Although we know that the readership of *Funü zazhi* and *Shenbao* was not just female,<sup>17</sup> it seems clear that women were those able to introduce milk into their own diet and more into those of their children.

### **Women as 'targeted' consumers**

From the late Qing to the Early Republican period, women in Shanghai played a key role in the increasing familiarity with Western material culture, including food customs such as milk consumption. According to Swislocki, this new appreciation began with courtesans who contributed to the popularization of dining at Western restaurants. Later, at the turn of the century, women again, but no longer courtesans, were exhorted by social reformers to 'reconstitute the foundation of society by rearticulating a role for educated women in the home' following

the classical idea that 'a well-ordered state lay in a well-ordered family', which meant that Western food – as a modern device in a rational system of home economics – was considered a component of a traditional way of running a Chinese home (2009: 98–100).

The role attributed to the 'new woman' that was imagined and promoted by the young reformists of the New Culture Movement in the 1920s was, in a way, an extension of the previous conception of womanhood held by their predecessors. They, too, were convinced of the importance of family organization but thought that the nuclear family was a key element that enhanced the strength of Western countries. So following this line of thinking they considered that in order to reinforce the Chinese nation, it was necessary to begin with its basic social structure – the family unit – which depended for its proper functioning on a 'capable mother and good spouse' (*xianmu liangqi* 賢母良妻) adapting to the timely revisited locus classicus (Glosser 2003: 203n13). The skillful mother and spouse had to involve herself seriously in the appropriate rearing and educating of her children – first nourishing them properly, strengthening them physically and then educating them so that they became responsible adults and citizens ready to work for and serve their country (Schneider 2011: 20–56).

At this point, milk could have had a role because, in addition to recognized nutritional qualities, its consumption could have signified a path to modernity and freedom for women. By the end of the decade, women were thought of as established consumers, and milk, as an essential food, was one of the commodities they bought for themselves and their families – part of a widening trend in urban Chinese society. But this development was not straightforward. For example, 'representations of women were critical to the National Products Movement, which tried to define women through nationalistic consumption' as shown in a picture entitled 'A loving mother for her son' that illustrated a young woman dressed in Chinese style portrayed as attentively breastfeeding her baby. And in case readers did not understand the message, on her sleeve and across the baby's body was the slogan: 'supporter of national enterprises' (Gerth 2003: 288–289). The topic of this image was not accidental. It suggested that nationalist activists viewed the use of foreign (manufactured) milk for infant feeding as a betrayal in China. We shall see below that this implicit reproach probably did not meet its goal.

### Long-life milk!

Who could have resisted the wonderful invention of condensed and powdered milk that appeared in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century? The most interesting advantage of these new foods was that,

no longer perishable, they could be used all year round and in hot climates. Furthermore, milk that was ‘condensed’ or ‘reduced’ to powder had less volume, allowing it to be transported to a long distance undamaged (Hunziker 1914: 181–183). A malted milk, Nestlé’s Milk Food, had been sold worldwide following its invention in Switzerland in 1867; less than a decade later, fierce competition had arisen in world milk markets among some American, British and Swiss dairy companies for the sale of condensed milk, milk powder or malted milk (Heer 1966: 43).

From the 1880s, all these products were largely successful in Asia as in Indonesia (Den Hartog 2001: 38). The volume of importations to China rapidly increased in a critical way. Between 1904 and 1918, the quantity of imported tinned milk into Shanghai tripled, apparently growing annually in response to demand (Arnold 1919: 282). Later, according to 1935 statistics, imports of milk powder and condensed milk represented almost the same value as that of the production of fresh milk in Shanghai (Wang and Chen 1984: 5). These tinned products being preferred by Chinese consumers, several milk factories were established in China to manufacture milk powder and condensed milk, but not before 1928 (Xie Chengxia 1985: 102).<sup>18</sup>

### **The arguments of a persuasive discourse**

There were several possible reasons for the success of these manufactured versions of milk, powdered, condensed and infant formula. First was the boom in newspaper and magazine advertisements from the 1920s: a daily average of one on milk in the *Shenbao* Journal from 1927 to 1937, mainly dedicated to foreign brands (Li Zhongping 2010: 107n4). Then according to a rapid calculation, their price, which – although not cheap – was nevertheless probably lower than that of fresh milk (Wang 2011: 220–221).<sup>19</sup> It is likely that the dependability of their supply, unlike that of fresh milk which was subject to unexpected contingencies and fluctuations, also contributed to their success. In spite of frequent movements boycotting foreign commodities that could sometimes have hindered their accessibility, they generally remained available (Gerth 2003: 158–202). Their long shelf life and their attractive and practical packaging were also assets in a country where retail sale was the most common type of transaction. And, of course, ease of use must have been a very strong incentive. It was so simple to add boiled water to these tinned substances to obtain the predictable white liquid that appeared so similar to ‘fresh’ milk. As discussed above, the hygiene of fresh milk was also a concern, and the fear of consuming adulterated milk was cleverly exploited by advertisers, illustrated in the 1924

*Gow's Guide to Shanghai*: the back of the cover of this small book carried a warning that said 'fresh milk is DANGEROUS in the East' (Gow 1924: 146).<sup>20</sup> Although this guide was aimed at an English-speaking readership, it reveals, nevertheless, that everyone knew that liquid 'fresh milk' in hot climates was not always safe. This problem was often mentioned in Chinese texts too, in which authors advised boiling fresh liquid milk in order to preserve it from rapid deterioration (Zou Dejin 1970 [1917]: 92). But more interesting is the rhetoric that developed in the press or in popular texts to encourage the consumption of these 'industrial' milk products.

The promotion of milk products deemed suitable for all, such as 'Horlicks malted milk designed for infants, invalids, aged and travellers', stressed their energy-giving qualities but lost their earlier presentation as health remedies during the 1910s. Horlicks was sold either in grocery shops or pharmacies, which helps define its twin-status as food or tonic. It was praised in verse: 'It can be taken as beverage/it can be a food/its taste is sweet, its smell pleasant/everybody likes it/a cup in the morning or at evening/and both spirit and body are at ease' (FNZZ 1930: 1).<sup>21</sup>

These promotional discourses of infant-milk advertisements were much more numerous and their reasoning directly addressed to mothers. Mothers had to be convinced of the need to adopt milk substitutes for the health benefits that they offered their children when they could themselves have been the appropriate providers of food for them. Therefore, selling them required an effective capacity for persuasion and the development of the ability to understand their needs. This is why the promotional statements generally revolved around the issue of breastfeeding albeit without saying so too openly.

Although each brand had its own rhetoric, promotional discourses written in Chinese usually began with the statement that 'the milk most suitable for babies was their mothers', as was the case for *Momilk* by New-York Fraser Milk Products or for the US Dry Milk Company's *Dryco* (FNZZ 1930: 1, 2). Nestlé's reasoning supporting the famous brand *Lactogen* (*letujing* in Chinese transcription) was often more acute, detailed and precise: after asserting that mother's milk is the best for babies, one advertisement goes on to explain that

sometimes because of some problems the new mother cannot feed her baby herself, so she had to be substituted by another way. In that case infant formula *letujing*, which contains every healthy element and which has to be mixed with an appropriate volume of water, gives a composition similar to mother's milk.

It is illustrated with a drawing of a nice young woman dressed in traditional clothes kissing the baby in her arms. The picture gives the impression of true love between the mother and infant, suggesting that even if she cannot breastfeed him, she gives him the best nourishment she can and, of course, that she still loves him (FNZZ 1926: 7). Because of the portrayal of a loving mother coupled with the claims that here is a perfect solution when women cannot breastfeed, the advertisement could be construed as offering this very solution for other loving mothers for whom it could be more convenient than breastfeeding – somehow better even for both mother and children. Indeed in the 1920s and 1930s, according to the famous nutritionist Cicely Williams, in Asia ‘breast-feeding was not considered smart by a large section of the population’ (Den Hartog 1986: 179). Could it have been the same for Chinese women during this period?

### **Milk attitudes**

How might the discussion presented so far be brought together to create a hypothesis about the birth of the Chinese interest in milk manifest from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, considering that the majority had never before been regular consumers of dairy products? The term ‘interest’ seems to be more appropriate than the word ‘taste’. Except for some examples of very special and rare uses of milk for making elaborate delicacies prized at the Manchu court and in some parts of China, it is assumed there was no testament to a genuine, Chinese appetite (in the sense of enjoyment) for raw milk. Milk was invested with specific qualities linked with idealized Western values like science, health and modernity that were deemed to respond to Chinese needs at a particular moment in Chinese history. Several policy makers, reformers, physicians and agriculturists had wanted to import its consumption into China, as part of a global overhaul of Chinese ways of life that, according to them, had to be undertaken.

If we try to argue from a sociological perspective, at least four kinds of actors can be identified in that movement and their roles can be clarified: foreign expatriates; various Chinese officials; mediators; and, finally, consumers. Foreign expatriates were the first to maintain their own food habits in China and to import cattle for local production and consumption. Chinese officials were high-ranking scholars, policy makers, intellectuals, educated young reformers and entrepreneurs who were persuaded of the goodness of milk as a healthy product and who wanted to spread its consumption to everyone. Moreover, some of them, inspired by foreign experience, also thought that the development of

animal husbandry was necessary to build a modern country's economy. Mediators are more difficult to characterize, but urban women could be considered as essential to the craze for milk of that period. As discussed, advertising in the 1920s specifically targeted women because not only could they use fresh milk or milk substitutes to feed their babies but also, afterwards, they could transmit the habit of drinking milk to their children, who – once grown up – would continue this consumption. Consumers may have only been urbanites, about 20 per cent of the population as calculated by the nutritionist and biochemist Wu Xian, but they could be clearly categorized. As already noted, only the topmost layers of society could have had access to fresh milk delivered daily. What kind of milk did less affluent Shanghainese from the upper middle classes drink? If not fresh milk, they probably could have bought every brand of foreign (and from the late 1920s, Chinese) milk substitutes, either condensed or powdered, along with milk foods like Horlicks or Ovomaltine. However, they were privileged compared to the overwhelming majority of factory workers who probably could not afford to buy it at all, either fresh or preserved, or could only buy it on special occasions.

What about the remaining population, more than 80 per cent of the inhabitants of the country, which is to say, the people living in the countryside? Alongside a minority of the well-to-do who could afford to buy luxuries, they were the poor and the poorest of China who certainly did not drink any milk. Note that the children were the main concern for Buck and Wu Xian in the late 1920s because they lacked the necessary nutrients for normal growth and would have benefitted from drinking milk regularly. Both specialists considered that 'milk production appears economically impossible on the average Chinese farm at present, particularly by the means of the dairy cow [...] there may be situations where the goat can find a place' (Buck 1937: 433). We have seen that it was the proposal made by a deceived Wu Xian, who had to admit that there was no other possibility of improving a peasant's conditions of life.

This global schema of milk consumption diffusion in the 1920s in China approximately corresponds to some points of the models of diffusion of innovations highlighted by Den Hartog in his research on milk consumption in colonial Indonesia. Den Hartog quotes the food historian Wiegelman, who says that expensive foods 'are first adopted by the upper class of a society and through close contact and imitation they often move down the social scale to the lowest classes [...] Finally the food will lose its exclusive character and becomes part of the diet of the lower classes' (in Den Hartog 1986: 17–21). Wiegelman's model undeniably applies to China if a century-long perspective is adopted. Milk

consumption began in around the 1920s by wealthy urban citizens and only in the 2000s started to become common all over China. Even now it is not yet usual for the lowest classes of the society. Indeed, it was the wish of ex-premier Wen Jiabao who said, 'I have a dream that every Chinese, especially children, could have 0.500 kg of milk everyday'.<sup>22</sup>

There has to be a 'key group (...) prepared to consider innovations seriously and sympathetically' to play a leadership role in the diffusion of milk practices (Den Hartog 1986: 17). As Goody (1982: 178) clearly stated for Ghana, there is no doubt that foreigners were the initiators of the movement in various ways and that they were imitated by the most affluent and educated Chinese, who had been able to be in contact with them in Shanghai or abroad during their stays in United States or in Europe. In turn, the upper middle classes, who wanted to be modern, too, followed their lead. And all of them were exposed to energetic pro-milk advertising that could have had a decisive impact on their motivation.

However, one has to stress the specific and key role that urban women played in the Chinese milk issue, especially in the general acceptance of milk substitutes and mainly of milk powder.<sup>23</sup> Their crucial position as future or young mothers and objects of reformers' programmes aimed at transforming them according to an idealized image was presented above. As to nourishing children, the hypothesis is that Chinese women became modern in their own way because, as elsewhere, avoiding breastfeeding was a fashion in Chinese cities at the beginning of the twentieth century. It may be presumed that they often refused to breast-feed, arguing that they were exhausted or that they had not enough milk, and in doing so they imitated a traditional model that had historically existed only in high-ranking families (Bray 1997: 347n31). This choice rewarded them in the conjunction of an attachment to a valued model of motherhood with an irresistible attraction to modernity. Powdered milk substitutes, hygienically secured, formulated to be healthy for babies and, moreover, so convenient, were the means for escaping the breastfeeding burden or the worry of finding wet nurses (even when they had the ability to pay for the service). Even though statistics on the decline of breastfeeding in urban China are not sufficiently accurate, it is known that its rate began to decline acutely from the mid-1930s and reached its lowest point in the 1980s until an alarming figure of 10 per cent for Beijing and Shanghai was reached – provoking grave concern for the Chinese government, who implemented public education measures to redress the problem (Pasternak and Wang 1985; Jun Jing 2000: 13).

Yet, using powdered milk became second nature, and not only for women who, when they had the means after weaning, continued to feed dairy products to their children but also for each family member who wanted to consume milk and had only to open a tin and to mix a spoonful of its contents with boiling water to obtain a cup of milk. This milk was desired by anyone who cared for their health in Chinese cities in the late 1930s. This habit has undoubtedly contributed to an understanding of the health advantages of milk consumption in Chinese urban society during the 1930s that accords more closely with nutritional scientific knowledge. But it also entailed what from that scientific point of view is a misconception of the very nature of milk, which is to say, fresh milk. Even when pasteurization reached China after 1923, it seemed that some time passed before it was commonly used (Wang and Chen 1994: 6). To Western scientific eyes, Chinese consumers did not really understand the organoleptic properties of fresh milk, which had to be explained, as clearly stated in an ad published in a *Shenbao* issue in 1935:

Pasteurized grade A milk has been pasteurized after having being milked less than twenty four hours before. When one uses imported milk powder and blends it with water, the result put in a glass bottle looks like milk but it is a mixture of ingredients of several years old, and when one tastes it, it still has the powder's taste. How is it possible to compare it with the quality of genuine fresh milk?

(Shanghai diqu 2006)

Reading this argument, we see that unlike European or American consumers,<sup>24</sup> Chinese consumers did not differentiate between fresh and powdered milk and thus had to be persuaded that fresh milk was much better than powdered milk. Despite the quasi-discontinuation of milk consumption during 30 years from the 1950s to the 1980s when a new dairy industry was launched, 'milk powder represented a major portion in the Chinese dairy market, and liquid milk was not a common shelf product' until 2000. According to consumption figures, in 2006 milk powder still represented 25 per cent of the daily dairy intake (KPMG 2008: 3–5).

In Chinese consumers defence and without falling into the trap of a culturalist argument that would explain everything and nothing, we can follow Wu Xian, who at the beginning of his book observed:

Milk as food is mentioned in the Bible, and the habit of its consumption started probably in the pastoral populations of the

Middle East. Then Europeans adopted milk too. In Chinese Classics there is no mention of the use of milk. These last years it has been occasionally used and that results from a progressive Westernization of the East ((1947) [1929]: 99).

In China, there was no Canaan, a land where milk and honey flowed and no 'milk spreading out into an ocean churned by gods and demons' as in Indian mythology (Mahias 1988: 265). Indeed, Wu Xian could not have expressed more accurately how milk lacked a real positive symbolic meaning in Chinese history outside the practical and trivial use of human milk. Finally, milk had long been considered an ambiguous animal product: a tonic, an ingredient in some delicacies and also the typical beverage of barbarian neighbours. Indeed, only human milk, as a special medicine, could be drunk at the very source directly suckled by senior adults in order to replenish them. To be drinkable, milk has otherwise to be transformed and elaborated. For example, there is no evidence of the pleasure in drinking freshly milked milk. On the contrary, this kind of custom was attributed to barbarian breeders as proof of their uncivilized manners that disgusted Chinese people. So the success of milk powder is not so surprising. Milk powder is obtained through a complex technical process and finally is somehow similar to some medicines in appearance. Interestingly, one must not forget that in Northern China, and especially in Beijing, there was and there still is an old tradition of genuine yogurt that is appreciated altogether for its delicious taste and for its health benefit. But yogurt is no more plain raw milk, it is the delicious result of a very elaborate fermenting process applied to milk, and in a way like milk powder, it is the result of human's technical knowledge which transforms it into something that has nothing in common with a natural animal secretion. It is a genuine human, that is manufactured, food.

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## Notes

1. Nevertheless, China's milk consumption is below the average of developing countries and the world average of about 80 kg per capita. The average in developed countries is about 200 kg.
2. Recent research by geneticists suggests that lactose intolerance, or the inability to produce lactase after childhood, is hardly unique to East Asia and is in fact shared by 70 per cent of the world's population (Itan et al. 2009).
3. Milk in that text, unless stated otherwise, is cow's milk.
4. Indeed, the existence of two native dairymen is mentioned in the census of the British settlement included in the annual 1865 report by the Shanghai Municipal Council (Shanghai Archives).
5. In the foreign settlements, foreign authorities were responsible for the local administration of police, hygiene and road management. The Shanghai Municipal Council of International Settlement consisted of an elected oligarchy that was rather autonomous compared to other local administrations and to the Peking diplomatic corps (Bergère 1979: 1043–1044).
6. Unless noted otherwise, the translations from Chinese to English are mine.
7. This is the Glosser's translation.
8. The consumption of dairy products and milk is not mentioned in another article on the life and salary of Shanghaiese workers which referred to the same sources and inquiry (Zhang Zhongming 2011).
9. His collaboration with the Japanese Manchukuo government has overshadowed his fame as an orthodox interpreter of modern Chinese history.
10. One of the professors teaching animal husbandry, Levine, had written several articles about Chinese husbandry and the dairy situation in Guangdong some years before (1917, 1919).
11. It was republished at least eight times until 1970.
12. I could not locate biographical information on Xu Fuqi (born in 1904 and graduated from the Agricultural University of Jinling in 1927), except his mention about the creation of the Horticulture Society with other agronomists in 1929 (<http://baike.baidu.com/view/415705.htm>, accessed 10 March 2013).
13. Xu Ke (1869–1928) author of *Qingbai lei chao (yinshi pian)*, quoted in Wang (2011: 215).
14. In his article, Li Zhongping quotes another article published in 1918 in the *Dongfang zazhi (Oriental Magazine)* by the American bacteriologist and nutritionist of Yale University, Leo Rettger, which was translated into Chinese.
15. Wu Xian's work was based on 14 surveys that were carried out primarily in cities between 1925 and 1936. But his statement was nevertheless correct: the diet of the poorest rural populations at that time was the least sufficient.

16. We now know that it is not true: goat milk is not appropriate for infant feeding because the 'levels of iron, cobalt and folic acid are inadequate' (Den Hartog 1986: 226n94).
17. Many articles in *The Ladies' Journal* were written by male authors, too (Nivard 1982).
18. As, for example, the condensed milk factory of the West Lake in Hangzhou, created in 1931. The first one, according to Xie Chengxia, was founded in 1928 by an entrepreneur from Wenzhou in the province of Zhejiang (Xie Chengxia 1985: 102).
19. This is according to the comparison between the estimations given by Glosser (1999: 212n18) for a daily fresh milk supply and those by Suzie Wang for canned milk and milk powder (2011: 220). But these figures have yet to be verified and confirmed.
20. Capital letters in the original text.
21. Ovomaltine promotional discourses were in the same vein: 'If you want to strengthen your body/it is simple to mix it with boiling water/ you drink this essence (nectar)/it will benefit to your spirit' (FNZZ 1931: 5).
22. This declaration was made in 2006 during a visit to a dairy farm in Chongqing (*China Daily*, 23 April 2008, quoted in KPMG 2008).
23. I cannot explain why milk powder seemed to have been preferred to condensed milk. Was it even easier to use a powder than a thick liquid?
24. For example, Catalanian people began to drink milk on a regular basis rather later than Northern Europe inhabitants – not before the 1920s. At the same time, they disliked milk substitutes (either powdered or condensed) that they called 'machine milks', and their consumption rate remained very low (Nicolau-Nos, Pujol-Andreu and Hernandez 2010: 124).

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# 10

## Drink, Meals and Social Boundaries

*Sami Zubaida*

Jack Goody's *Food and Love* includes a chapter entitled 'Why no wine on the table', in which he reflects on the patterns of indulgence and reluctance to drink and their possible interpretations (Goody 1998: 172–182). As always, it is rich with insight and erudition, with intriguing comparisons. I start this chapter by pursuing some of these themes.

The place of alcohol in different cultures can be broadly divided into dietary and recreational functions, which overlap and change over time. Wine in some southern European countries, notably Italy and parts of France, is integral to the diet and a source of calories and uncontaminated drink to the majority of the population before later modernity. Beer, or 'small beer', fulfilled a similar function in parts of northern Europe, including Britain. It was a breakfast drink before the spread and democratization of coffee and tea and the cheapening of sugar. As Goody notes, beer has a similar dietary function in parts of Africa (Goody 1998: 178–180). In parts of Sudan, pious Muslims drink it without associating it with forbidden alcohol: it is liquid bread. While in most of the modern world, the uses of alcohol are recreational, associated with leisure and pleasure, it remains for many an important element in the balance of diet and of the meal, functions which will be explored in this chapter.

Goody is particularly concerned with patterns of use and exclusion of alcohol in the Abrahamic religions. In Islam it is formally prohibited or avoided (we shall see that this is widely bypassed), but he also detects reluctances and avoidances in some contexts of Judaism and Christianity, both requiring the ritual use of wine. He speculates that the association with ritual may discourage secular consumption and the sin and temptation to which excessive consumption can lead. Another factor is the association of wine with luxury and display.

This follows from Goody's seminal comparative distinction between the class-differentiated Eurasian societies and the more homogenous Africa (Goody 1982: 97–153). In the former, luxury consumption elicits ascetic ethical reactions against indulgence, including wine. This reservation does not apply where wine or alcohol is part of everyday diet, as noted above. Goody notes that this ambivalence has much less effect in the democratized consumer culture of recent modernity (1998: 180).

### Autobiographical note

My personal narrative of alcohol in the context of Abrahamic religions and the Middle East is pertinent to the discussion. To start, there are the Jewish rituals over wine and its relation to lay consumption. In the Iraqi Jewish community where I grew up, the 'wine' used in ritual in most households was unfermented, non-alcoholic, grape juice or drink made from soaked raisins. The Hebrew designation *ha-gefen*, the subject of the blessing, was deemed to apply to a grape drink. At that point, appropriate (kosher) wine was not available commercially, and only a few households made their own wine from raisins. This practice, however, was not avoidance of alcohol: the same people (mostly the men) would drink *arak*, whisky and beer unreservedly. It is just that wine was not on the agenda of alcohol and leisure.

At the time of my boyhood in Baghdad, in the 1940s and 1950s, alcohol was commonly sold and consumed in many venues and classes of society. In the Jewish and Christian milieux, alcohol was common in home entertainments and celebrations. Some Muslim modern elites would also drink in their homes and celebrations, but many were careful to conceal their drinking. Drinking in public places, on the other hand, was much more common and widespread in the urban population, including among Muslims. Popular bars, *meykhanas*, were widely distributed in downtown Baghdad, cheap and frequented by men of the 'rough' classes, where drunkenness and fights were not unusual. They were run and staffed mostly by Christians, Assyrian/Chaldean from the north and the occasional Armenian. The middle-class men, professionals and modern businessmen drank in leafy 'casinos' in the more salubrious parts of the city, notably the aptly named Abu Nuwas street (Abu Nuwas (756–814) being the Abbasid poet renowned for his celebration of wine) on the bank of the Tigris. Entertainment venues included cabarets and nightclubs catering for different classes – all serving drink. The drink in all these venues consisted of *arak*, the 'traditional', native drink throughout Ottoman lands, supplemented by the

ever more popular beer of local manufacture and, for the prosperous, whiskey; wine was not on the agenda (Zubaida 2002: 212–230).

For me, as a boy, the drinking of adults was always associated with conviviality and pleasure, animated and humorous conversation and, on festive occasions, music and song. There was always a table of mezze: nuts, salads, fruit, dips, cheese, fava beans, sometimes more substantial dishes like fried salted fish and meat patties, in which I partook with a soft drink. *Arak* was made in factories, distilled from fermented dates or raisins and flavoured with mastic; aniseed came later and was associated with the Levant. I have since found that mastic flavouring was common in Ottoman lands and was only displaced by aniseed in later times. Our *arak* was home-made, by a cooperative of households, who hired the equipment and labour and made sure of the quality and purity of the ingredients. I recall finding some bottles in a cupboard and surreptitiously tasting the liquid, which I found astringent: I guessed that the mezze eaten with it was like the sweets we were given after swallowing bitter medicine.

With this positive glow on alcohol, I knew nothing of the disastrous effects that heavy drinking had on some, mainly poorer, people, including illness, penury and violence which ruined families. These examples had always fuelled religious and ethical campaigns and prohibitions such as the nineteenth-century Temperance movements. A Swedish colleague researching Muslim population in Malmö informed me that his socialist father, part of the native Temperance movement, was now making common cause with Muslim clerics.

## Muslims and alcohol

The mention of wine, *khamr*, in the Quran is various. It is clear that wine, made from fermented dates or grape, was commonly known and drunk in the Arabian milieu of early Islam. Earlier verses in the Quran praise the benefits of wine, and wine is promised to the pious in paradise. But the consensus of opinion considers later verses which were against wine to have overruled the earlier ones. The decisive verse:

O believers, wine and gambling, idols and divining arrows are an abhorrence, the work of Satan. So keep away from it, that you may prevail. Satan only desires to arouse discord and hatred among you with wine and gambling, and to deter you from the mention of God and from prayer.

(5.90, Khalidi 2008: 94)

It is interesting to note that the context of this prohibition is one of social order, as distinct from the verses elsewhere which prohibit pork, blood and carrion in the context of purity. This social order focus has a significance for later permissive interpretations which considered that it only applies to 'rough' common people who are out of control and cause trouble, and not for refined elites.

This explicit prohibition of alcohol in Islam as well as the common breach of this prohibition in so many social contexts, historically and at present, has made for a potent theme in moral and cultural discourse. Many Muslims flouted the prohibition, some with a trust in God's mercy towards faithful sinners, others with explicit rationalizations, commonly the view that the prohibition is a matter of social order against the drunkenness of common and ignorant people (*al-'awam*) and should not apply to the refined elite (*al-kahssa*). The tension between commandment and practice, however, offered a fertile theme for poetry, narrative, mysticism and humour. Classical *belles lettres* narratives and essays feature tales and humour about drink. The poetry of Abu Nuwas is but one prominent example of the *khamriyat* (wine literature) genre, continuing throughout the ages. Alcohol and the imagery of intoxication are common elements in the lore of Sufi mysticism. While some apologists have argued that this is a purely literary device or a spiritual analogy, not referring to real practice, we do know that many of the mystics and some tariqas (Sufi orders) used alcohol as part of their ceremony (many others frowned on the practice and denounced it). Much of popular as well as literary humour revolves around tales of the hypocrisy of pious people, including clerics, with regard to drink and intoxication (Zubaida 2003: 49–51). In short, the lore of alcohol is a potent element in diverse cultural fields in Middle Eastern history and society.

Drink, then, constituted a boundary of identities and affiliations not only between Muslims and other religious communities who drank but also within the Muslim groups. Drinking acquired ideological dimensions, especially when it was publicly proclaimed or entered into celebrations and ceremonies as in the rituals of certain Sufi orders, such as Bektashi and Mevlevi. Equally, it became an idiom of contest and assertion between groups and factions. One notable example of these contests was the *Shu'ubiyya* issue in the Abbasid period (750–1258). The *Shu'ubis*, mostly on non-Arab, Persian ancestry or affiliation, such as the poet Abu Nuwas, challenged and satirized the claims to supremacy and honour of certain Arabs, and with it religious piety and censure. For Abu Nuwas drink was a potent symbol of this challenge. In one poem,

he draws a picture of himself and an Arab travelling companion arriving at a place, and while his companion seeks out a ruin to cry over (reference to poetic convention of the classical Arabic ode which starts with crying over the ruins of the camp of the departed beloved), he seeks out the tavern (*khammara*) of the town. He then ridicules the Arab pride of lineage and their traditional drink of fermented milk.

For the most part, respectable people drank discreetly, in private spaces and in trusted company. The *khassa*, the elites and the powerful, princes and wazirs and qadis had nothing to fear. They developed the etiquette, *adab*, of drinking and companionship. A common pattern of courtly and elite drinking through the ages is that they drank to excess and over long periods, sometimes many days, entertained by poetry, music, conversation and sex. A strikingly frank autobiography is that of Babur, the first Mughal emperor of India (1483–1530): he tells us that all his life he was tormented by his addiction to wine, in which he indulged to excess, and the love of boys: he kept a harem of catamites. Both indulgences challenged his wish to be a pious Muslim king (Babur 1993). This ambivalence was also common to other dynasts, notably the Abbasids: Caliphs such as Harun al-Rashid (766–809) retained in their entourage fiery preachers, whose function was to preach hellfire to the sovereign and urge repentance, to floods of tears from the sinner. This was part of the cycle that then saw the culprit return to his binge drinking and sexual debauchery (al-Wardi 1954).

The soldiery and the toughs of the lower orders similarly had their drinking cultures and spaces and, for the most part, could defy piety with impunity. The Janissary forces of the Ottoman Empire were a prominent example (Goodwin 1994: 87–90). The common people who drank were subject to the vagaries of different regimes and occasional prohibitions. We have a fictional picture in Orhan Pamuk's historical novel, *My Name Is Red* (Pamuk 2002), of the coffee house that constituted a bohemian space for artists, story tellers and shadow plays, *karakouz*, which occasionally satirized the pious *mullas*, who eventually get their revenge by sacking the establishment and murdering some of its characters.

Non-Muslims, Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians play a special part in drinking lore over the ages. In many Muslim polities, these minorities were licensed or tolerated to produce and sell alcohol. Consumers included Muslims, who were, in turn, often (but not always) interdicted from production and distribution. Over time and territory there was a wide variety of types of spaces of consumption, from the sumptuous taverns and cafés of parts of Istanbul to the dirt tracks at the edge

of habitations, known in Iran and elsewhere as *kharabat*, ruins. The backs of grocers' shops in certain markets were locations of consumption in Iraq and elsewhere in more recent times. In terms of boundaries, these venues are interesting spaces of both interaction, maybe even friendship, but categorical distance at the same time: the relationship of provider/consumer defines the distinct identities of each.

An interesting realm of ambiguity revolved around *boza*, a drink made from fermented grain or stale bread, which was widespread through Ottoman lands and into parts of Africa, and a sanitized version continues to be drunk in Turkey at the present time. The ambiguity of boza is that it was not supposed to be alcoholic, but much of it was, depending on degree of fermentation. 'Sweet' boza was non-alcoholic and the 'sour' was the sugar having been fermented into alcohol. This ambiguity allowed a large measure of subterfuge by producers and sellers. *Bozakhane(s)*, taverns selling boza, were widespread in Turkey in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, until gradually displaced by coffee houses in the following century. A study of court records in Bursa found that these joints were an important source of tax revenues, and the authorities were keen to maintain them but were occasionally bothered by reports and complaints of drunkenness. The keepers of these taverns were from diverse backgrounds, many of them Muslims, with the pretence of non-alcoholic nature of the drink. Patrons were diverse: locals of different communities, travellers, itinerant dervishes, folk poets and story tellers. This social promiscuity was always feared by the authorities, as subversive of a social order dependent on the maintenance of communal boundaries (Selcuk 2011: 38). This threat of social promiscuity and moral degeneracy was carried over to the later coffee houses, as we saw with the example from Orhan Pamuk's work. Boza survived the decline of the bozakhane and continued to be a popular drink, often sold by itinerant pedlars well into the twentieth century and is now bottled in factories and sold as a traditional drink, part of the Muslim heritage.

Istanbul, with its European quarters of Pera and Galata over the centuries, nurtured taverns and drinking venues, some of which were respectable. To the Muslims these venues had special fascination: alien, accessible and alluring. Even the Sultan Mehmet II, Fatih, himself, has a poem expressing these sentiments attributed to him:

Nobody would think of the river of paradise after drinking the pure wine that he (Christ? Christian?) drank

Nobody would go a mosque after seeing the church where he went

O Avni, anybody would know that s/he was a Frankish beauty

After seeing the girdle around his/her waist and the crucifix around his/her neck.

(Quoted in Eldem 1999: 150)

A Qadi of Galata in the seventeenth century, writing poetry with the name Jafar, was another known as a regular of those taverns which he celebrated in his poetry.

François Georgeon has written a fascinating account of the symbolic significance of alcohol for notions of modernity and civilization in Turkey from the nineteenth century (Georgeon 2002: 7–30). Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839) was the first reforming ruler who made a serious impact. He modelled himself on other European rulers and included alcohol as a feature of public occasions such as official dinners and receptions. Champagne, which was not new to the Ottoman court, then came out in public. Over the course of the century and among the modern elites and the official classes, drink came to be associated with being modern and with civilization. Husrev Pasha, *serasker* (army chief),

[would drink] champagne with an influential European [even though he did not like it and preferred water], to show how he had shed completely the prejudices of the old Turkey: he knows full well that the fact will be noted in a newspaper article.

(Georgeon 2002: 17)

Georgeon adds that the disappearance, in 1826, of the janissaries and their association with alcohol from the public scene ‘permitted a shift to civilian, and by extension “civilised” consumption of alcohol’ after that date. Later in the century, the state class of the expanded reform bureaucracy became the vanguard of the drinking classes. To cater for them, a new type of refined and opulent tavern or *meyhane* came into existence, with a professional guild of tavern keepers and their assistants trained in the arts of serving drink and its accompaniment of mezze and in the skills of nursing a *narguila* (water pipe). Among the consumers, a new *adab* – etiquette and lore of drink – determined a kind of *savoir boire*.

Much of this new culture of drinking revolved around the newly fashionable *rakı/arak*, displacing the earlier wine and boza. It became an identity marker as a specifically native drink, in contrast to the more cosmopolitan and European wine. It acquired the honorific description of *arslan sutu* (lion’s milk), and in Arabic (at least in Iraq) of *halib sba’* with the same meaning. It became the drink of choice in the cafés, clubs and

salons of intellectuals and reformers, which included the poet Namik Kemal (1840–1888) and the statesman Midhat Pasha (1822–1884). Later in the century, under the more religious and authoritarian reign of Abdul-Hamid II (r. 1876–1909) there was a backlash against this drinking culture, both religious and medical, but with little effect. *Rakı* was to feature again as part of the culture of the Turkish Republic under Atatürk, himself a noted devotee of the beverage. It is said that old Kemalist stalwarts were still to be seen until recent times at the bar in Sirkeci railway station at sunset raising a glass to the memory of their hero, accompanied by the classic and austere mezze preferred by the pasha: the *beyaz maza* (white table) of white cheese, melon, yogurt and cucumber.

Alcohol and drinking culture became an issue concerning authenticity and identity. In the aftermath of municipal elections that brought the Islamic Refah Partisi to power in Istanbul in 1994, one of the first issues that arose between the Islamic mayors and the Kemalist bourgeoisie was that of drink. The bars and restaurants of Beyoğlu, the cosmopolitan centre of the city, were targeted by the mayor, who did not dare to ban alcohol but made rules restricting its visibility: establishments were requested not to allow drinking on terraces and at street tables and to hide their drinkers behind curtains. An outcry from the modern bourgeoisie, with demonstrations of street drinking, soon forced the withdrawal of the order. On a more recent visit to Istanbul, I came across two new bars in Beyoğlu: one named Victor Cohen Sheraphanesi (wine bar), the other going by the equally typical Greek name of Stavros Sheraphanesi. On inquiry, it seemed that both were run by Turkish Muslim entrepreneurs who had acquired the old names to recreate the atmosphere and associations of the old ‘cosmopolitan’ Beyoğlu. Another disco bar in that quarter had the potentially blasphemous name of Abdul-JabBAR (Abdul-Jabbar being a reference to one of the attributes of God). More recent reports, however, indicate that in the more conservative parts of Istanbul and other cities, especially in Anatolia, authorities from the ruling pro-Muslim Justice and Development Party (AK Party; successor to the Refah Partisi of the 1990s) are banning or pressuring establishments serving alcohol in areas under their control. Alcohol consumption in today’s Turkey has become a potent identity marker in the political and cultural struggles between secularism and religiosity.

## **Fish and drink**

Taboos or antipathies to eating fish and, particularly, sea-food appear to be common, if little remarked, among the Muslim populations of the

Mediterranean (though not of the Gulf). The Shi'a have explicit prohibitions of shell fish as well as fish with no scales or fins, similar to Jewish prohibitions. In Sunni jurisprudence, there are hints in places but not such categorical prohibition. Yet, in common customs and mentalities, shellfish is avoided and in many places considered disgusting, while regular fish is not popular. This distaste is shared in Anatolian Turkey.<sup>1</sup> An exception is the *hamsi*, a kind of anchovy, of the Black Sea, a prominent item in the diet of people from that coastal region and an identity marker. Even Istanbul, surrounded by three seas and fine fisheries, appears to have shared in this distaste among its Muslim inhabitants. It was then primarily Greeks, Armenians and Jews who ate and served fish with enthusiasm. The establishments run by those groups in modern times (from nineteenth century) also served alcohol and were/are commonly designated *meyhanas*, taverns. Istanbul restaurants continue to the present day to be divided into meat and fish categories, although this division is now subverted by many new establishments which serve both. Traditional restaurants, in market areas, known as *esnaf lokantasi*, guild restaurants (reference to market people) did not serve fish or alcohol (Zubaida 1997–1998). Fish restaurants, as already noted, were labelled 'taverns', historically run by Greeks and Armenians, now predominantly by Muslim Turks. They did serve meat dishes but were chiefly renowned for their fish and mezza. Their clientele were the Istanbul modern bourgeoisie, mostly of secular outlook, though some may be 'cultural' Muslims. Strict Muslims, many of provincial origins avoided these restaurants. With the increasing polarization of religion and secularism in recent decades, the secular bourgeoisie are branded *rum*, Romans, a reference to Greeks and Europeans. The reservations about fish in these quarters were reinforced by its identification with alcohol and alien affiliation. However, there are many indications that this is now changing, with the emergence of a modern Muslim bourgeoisie, ascendant in business and politics and aspiring to the life styles of their secular opposites, but sans alcohol. They eat fish in a new type of establishment, restaurants, hotels and holiday resorts, mindful of the sensibilities of the new classes. We see then the significance of alcohol and its association with fish as an evolving boundary between classes and communities.

### Mezze, drink and 'Slow Food'

The Slow Food movement, alarmed at the dominance of industrialized food, ready meals and globalized fast food chains, campaigns for

a 'return' to a hypothetical previous age of 'slow food' – slow not only in time allocated for eating and savouring but also in the cultivation of ingredients and the preparation of food, in a manner conducive to conservation of environment, community and pleasure. These are laudable objectives, but as many have pointed out, it may tend to mythologize the past. Most people throughout the world and for much of human history ate fast. In Middle Eastern settings, and in much of the world, hungry people ate their food fast, whether in domestic settings, at market stalls or at work in fields or workshops. Many did not eat 'meals' but grabbed a crust. Even at feasts, people tended to get through many dishes in a short time. The exception to these prevalent patterns occurred in elite groups who drank alcohol with their food and lingered at table. As one medieval Arab writer on food and drink, Abu Zayd al-Balkhi opined:

Speaking from personal experience, he [Al-Balkhi] notes that on the occasion of small or large invitations where food is served but there is no *sharab* [wine] available, the guests quickly depart once the food is finished excusing themselves to attend to other matters. The presence of drink, however, has the opposite effect. It acts as a bond among the guests preventing their departure until the real pleasures of such gatherings, discussion and listening, occur and an atmosphere of sociability and pleasure prevails.

(Waines 1994: 116)

The history of the exchange of ambassadors between the Ottoman and the French courts in the eighteenth century provides an interesting illustration of contrast in modes of formal eating. Fatma Muge Gocek narrates this history (Gocek 1987). The French ambassador reported that after the formalities of presentation at court, he was invited to take a meal with the courtiers. He was led to a hall with a number of small tables, including a high table at one end at which he was sitting with the higher dignitaries. A succession of sumptuous dishes were then served at a fair pace. Everyone ate in silence, and the whole affair was finished within the hour. The story from the Ottoman ambassador, one Yermi Sakiz Mehmet Effendi (a notable figure of wit and intrigue), was quite different. He took to French courtly and aristocratic life with curiosity and pleasure. He marvelled at the leisurely dinners, well irrigated with wine and animated by conversation, wit and flirtation. It was the presence and the leading role of women on these occasions which most intrigued Mehmet Effendi.

The French dinner table in this example was typical of some of the elites of Europe, particularly of France and Italy, in which wine was an essential element of the meal. From early modernity the French model spread to other European courts and elites, notably Russia, and occasionally England. With the democratization of consumption and the gradual incorporation of lower social strata into that culture, the model of the multi-course dinner with wine became a norm for many – mostly in southern Europe but later among the prosperous classes of the north. It was this pattern that was to be eroded by fast food and convenience meals, giving rise to the discourse of slow food and the mythologization of the past.

Drink and food did not always go together. In England and much of northern Europe, most people drank (typically beer and spirits until recently) separately from the meal. In Britain in the second half of the twentieth century, some classes of people would eat an early evening meal (dinner or tea) fairly fast and then may go out to evening entertainment, involving drink, often at a pub or club. Another pattern was the late evening post-pub fish-and-chips or curry primarily among young, working class men. Drink was/is not part of the structure of the meal as it is in some other parts of Europe. The spread of wine consumption in more recent decades, as well as the diversification of lifestyles, has eroded this model, and most people now drink with food – if still fast – in front of the TV. The utopian ‘slow food’ model, at a guess, is still a minority pursuit among those able to afford it.

The separation of drink from the sequence of the meal was also largely true in Middle Eastern contexts. The sullen feast described by the French ambassador may not have been common, but by all accounts meals were generally subdued affairs – except for state occasions, court weddings and circumcisions – where guests still ate fast and silently. The wine table – however where it was served – came separately from the main meal, accompanied by sweetmeats and fruit, and was the occasion for conviviality and merriment. E.W. Lane in his classic *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (Lane 1896: 153), provides an example from nineteenth-century Egypt, where the elites carried over Ottoman styles of life and culture. He noted that in the tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*, the table of viands is removed to be followed by the table of wine. Contemporary Egyptians, though generally abstemious, included many who ‘habitually indulge in drinking wine with select parties of their acquaintance’ (which did not include Lane). He continued that drinking wine ‘was indulged in by such persons before and after supper, and during the meal; but it is most approved *before* supper,

as they say that it quickens the appetite'. He went on to describe the wine table set with cut-glass jugs of wine, water and perfumes, with a vase of flower and with saucers of dried fruit and pickles. This latter suggests the *mezze* genre, which was to predominate in modern times, to which we now turn.

The concept of *mezze* seems to be a general Mediterranean phenomenon of offering a range of small dishes, mostly savoury but also sweet, to accompany drink. In North Africa, it is *kemya* and in Spain *tapas* (though *tapas* seems to differ in that it is often a small portion of a cooked dish but that overlaps with *mezze*). The word 'mezze' is the Persian for 'taste', though not normally used in Iran in the sense of accompaniment to drink. The common translation of 'mezze' as 'hors d'oeuvre' is not accurate: while 'hors d'oeuvre' relates to a particular concept of the meal with a number of courses or services, 'mezze' does not refer to a meal but is intrinsically linked to drink at any time.

It is difficult to trace the origin and development of the concept and practice of *mezze*. Of course, serving little tastes with drink is not remarkable or peculiar and must have been common practice in many drinking cultures, as illustrated by Lane's account above. What is specific, however, is the institution of *mezze* as a genre of dishes with particular repertoires and sequences, especially in public drinking places. This practice appears to have been established primarily in Mediterranean cities with prominent Christian populations, notably Istanbul and Aegean cities, as well as the main cities of Lebanon, Palestine and Syria. It is in these cities that venues of public drinking were established in the modern period (i.e., from the nineteenth century) which were 'civilized' centres of sociability and leisure, as against the rough taverns prevalent throughout the region. It was primarily in these venues that the conventions and repertoires of *mezze* and drink were established, drawing on different food traditions – some popular/domestic (foul (fava beans), falafel, hummus, in the Arab land; dolma, fava, barbounya (beans), pasturma (cured meat) in Istanbul). In addition, there were specific ethnic foods (bearing in mind that Greek and Armenian in Istanbul were often distinct from mainland Greece and Armenia proper) such as the Armenian *topig* (a patty of stuffed mashed chickpeas) and numerous Greek fish preparations, as well as adaptations from European food such as 'Russian salad'. These repertoires have now been globalized and are common items served in many restaurants and bars everywhere and also appear on supermarket shelves.<sup>2</sup>

This pattern of food and drink had a 'civilizing' effect on both activities. We noted that, typically, people eat quickly. You have the original

fast foods in markets and food shops of kebabs, kebbe (meat patties) and pastries. But even elaborate dishes prepared with much labour for special occasions are devoured in minutes, much like the experience of the French ambassador in the Ottoman court noted above. The drink/mezze pattern represents an important departure in that food is consumed at a leisurely pace with conversation and entertainment. However, mezze was not the meal: so how did it relate to the meal?

As we noted, the mezze concept is intrinsically coupled with drink. In practice, a long evening of drink and mezze was concluded with a quick supper. When drinking out, the supper could be provided in the same establishment, ordered from a nearby food stall to consume in the café/bar or taken somewhere else altogether. There was, for instance, the tradition in many cities of concluding an evening of extensive drinking at a tripe joint in the early hours. The drink/mezze pattern also penetrated the home entertainments of the more prosperous and 'modern' urban classes (in this respect, it may be seen as a continuity with the wine-table pattern). Many of us experienced this home entertainment in which the guests arrive at eight to be seated in the drawing room with little tables set with varieties of nuts, fruits, cucumber and lettuce, and drinks are served (often soft drinks for the ladies and children and heavily diluted whisky/soda, Black Label for preference, to the men). Conversation, card games and television coexist, and the drinking and increasingly urgent munching of the hungry continue until about 11 o'clock, at which point an elaborate meal of many sumptuous and labour-intensive dishes is served. The hungry guests crowd around the table, mostly standing, and eat at a fair pace to conclude in half an hour or so, after which everyone goes home.

The emerging pattern in more recent times is for the mezze to become the meal in public establishments. This kind of meal becomes more 'civilized' with leisurely eating and drinking, which becomes a night out in its own right, much like the restaurant meal of Latin Europe (and which probably also had its origins in the tavern) – now generalized worldwide.

## In conclusion

We started with Jack Goody's reflection on 'why no wine on the table' and explored further the patterns of prohibition, avoidance and indulgence in relation to religious doctrines and the drawing of social boundaries. The focus is on Islam and the Middle East, and we saw that the well-known prohibition in Islam was/is often honoured in the breach but is a potent generator of sentiment and creativity in drinking

cultures. The role of alcohol in drawing social and ideological boundaries comes to prominence in the modern world giving rise to new religious ideologies and conflicts in recent decades. In many countries of Muslim majority as well as in the Muslim populations of the West, renouncing drink has become iconic in affirming Muslim identity and enforcing religious authority. In many instances religious authorities and militants are targeting bars, shops and producers, especially when those are Christians, with violence and extortion. Freedom to drink, equally, has become symbolic for struggling secularists. Pro-Muslim governments, such as those currently in Tunisia and Egypt, are caught between vociferous demands from their religious constituencies and the pragmatic concerns for tourist trades and the resistance of their liberal and secular opponents. Turkey, with its secular constitution but pro-Islamic current government, is a particularly interesting case of the drawing of boundaries and conflicts with respect to alcohol: a ban is not on the agenda, but the taxes on drink are rising, and pressures mount in some provincial centres and suburbs of the main cities.

The other theme is that of the place of drink in the structure of the meal. We noted that drink taken with the meal tends to have a civilising effect in making the meal more convivial and 'slow'. The emerging pattern of making *mezze* the meal is part of a much more general trend of dining and drinking on a global level. Many restaurants and bars throughout the world, catering for a leisured clientele, are 'discovering' native cultural forms of 'small plate' dining, replacing the convention of the three-course meal. *Mezze*, at first typical of the Mediterranean Middle Eastern cities, is now generalised throughout the world, and the Lebanese repertoire is adopted by Moroccan, Egyptian and Iraqi restaurants, among others. We saw that drink is intrinsic to the concept of *mezze*, though this – like many other aspects of modern cultures – is being diversified. Dining on *tapas* is equally popular, and the Italians have discovered their *cicchetti*. Current culinary discourse and practice are on constant lookout for innovation and invention, which is often buttressed by an invented tradition.

## Notes

1. For a comprehensive account of fish, drink and social divisions in modern Turkey, see Knudsen (2006).
2. On the growing popularity of snack foods in Kumasi, Ghana see Clark (this volume); on snack foods in Bangladeshi restaurants in London see Pottier (this volume); and on snack foods and new forms of leisurely dining with drinks in South India see Staples (this volume).

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