

The background of the cover is a light yellow-green gradient. It is decorated with several stylized, light green leaf motifs scattered across the surface. The title is in a large, bold, black sans-serif font.

FOOD AND AGRARIAN ORDERS IN THE WORLD- ECONOMY

Philip McMichael

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Contents

<i>Illustrations</i>	vii
----------------------	-----

<i>Introduction: Agrarian and Food Relations in the World-Economy</i>	ix
<i>Philip McMichael</i>	

Part I Food in World-Historical Perspective

1. Food and Its Relationship to Concepts of Power	3
<i>Sidney Mintz</i>	
2. Food Politics: New Dangers, New Possibilities	15
<i>Harriet Friedmann</i>	
3. Durable Food Production and Consumption in the World-Economy	35
<i>Susan J. Thompson and J. Tadlock Cowan</i>	

Part II Agriculture in World-Historical Perspective

4. Historical Transformations in Agrarian Systems Based on Wet-Rice Cultivation: Toward an Alternative Model of Social Change	55
<i>Ravi Arvind Palat</i>	

5. Fatal Conjunction: The Decline and Fall of the Modern Agrarian Order during the Bretton Woods Era
Resat Kasaba and Faruk Tabak 79

Part III Contemporary Agro-Food Complexes

6. Canadian Misfortunes and Filipino Fortunes: The Invention of Seaweed Mariculture and the Geographical Reorganization of Seaweed Production
Lanfranco Blanchetti-Revelli 97
7. Vines and Wines in the World-Economy
Roberto P. Korzeniewicz, Walter Goldfrank, and Miguel E. Korzeniewicz 113
8. The Regulation of the World Coffee Market: Tropical Commodities and the Limits of Globalization
John M. Talbot 139
9. On Global Pond: International Development and Commodity Chains in the Shrimp Industry
Mike Skladany and Craig K. Harris 169

Part IV Recomposition of Global and Regional Agro-Food Systems

10. Industrial Restructuring and Agrarian Change: The Greening of Singapore
Frances M. Ufkes 195
11. Gender and Cheap Labor in Agriculture
Jane L. Collins 217
12. Depeasantization and Agrarian Decline in the Caribbean
Ramon Grosfoguel 233
13. Free Trade Agreements: Their Impact on Agriculture and the Environment
Robert Schaeffer 255
- Selected Bibliography* 277
- Index* 281
- About the Contributors* 285

Illustrations

FIGURES

3.1	Durable Foods	38
7.1	World-System Location of Exports and Imports of Fresh Fruit and Wine, 1980s	128
7.2	World-System Location of Exports and Imports of Apples, Bananas, and Grapes, 1989–1990	130
10.1	Agricultural Self-Sufficiency Ratios, Singapore, Selected Products, 1972–1990	200
10.2	Former Pig Farming Estates and Agrotechnology Parks, Singapore	203
10.3	Singapore and Surrounding Region	209

TABLES

6.1	Yearly Production of <i>Euchema Cottoni</i> in the Philippines and Irish Moss in Canada, 1966–1985	105
7.1	Exports of Fresh Fruit, Apples, Grapes, and Wine from Argentina and Chile, 1970–1991	115
7.2	Exports of Fresh Fruit and Wine and Country Share of World Exports, 1987–1988	123
7.3	Imports of Fresh Fruit and Wine and Country Share of World Imports, 1987–1988	125

7.4	Average Value of FFV and Wine Exports, 1987–1988	129
8.1	Patterns of Production and Trade for Major Primary Commodity Exports of the Third World	142
8.2	Export Dependence and Market Concentration for Four Major Tropical Commodities, 1967	147
8.3	Destination of Coffee Exports from Major Coffee Producers, 1990	149
8.4	Dependence of Major Coffee Producers on Coffee Exports, 1967 and 1988–1989	157
9.1	Global Shrimp Harvest, 1981–1991	170
9.2	Shrimp Pond Production by Country, 1980–1990	172
9.3	Estimated Cultured Shrimp Harvests, 1987–1991	175
9.4	Partial Profile of Three Transnational Firms Engaged in Shrimp Pond Development	178
9.5	Shrimp Imports by Major Markets, 1986–1989	180
10.1	National Consumption Levels, Selected Agricultural Products, Singapore, 1972–1990	202
10.2	Farming Activities in Singapore Agrotechnology Parks, June 1993	207
10.3	Source of Singapore Pig Imports, 1988–1991	208
10.4	Source of Indonesian Pig Exports to Singapore, 1988–1991	210
12.1	Percentage Contribution of Agriculture to GDP at Factor Cost	237
12.2	Percentage Contribution of Agricultural Exports in Total Exports	238
12.3	Economically Active Population in Agriculture for Caribbean Countries	240
12.4	Tourism Income/Gross Domestic Product	242
12.5	Food Imports as a Percentage of Total Imports	243
12.6	Caribbean Legal Immigrants to the United States	244
12.7	Country Origin and Percentage of Total Caribbean Legal Immigrants per Decade	245
12.8	Caribbean Migrants in the Metropolis	247

Introduction: Agrarian and Food Relations in the World-Economy

Philip McMichael

The chapters in this book stem from the seventeenth annual Political Economy of the World-System (PEWS) conference, held at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, in April 1993. The conference is held under the auspices of the American Sociological Association. While the theme is always global, each year the topic (and venue) is different. In 1993 the focus was on the global dynamics of food and agricultural systems, a focus that is past due, and expresses a growing understanding of food and agrarian orders in the world-economy.

The delay in focusing on food/agriculture has an institutional explanation insofar as academic developmentalist studies embody an "urban bias." Theories of social change and modernity routinely have assigned a residual status to agriculture and rural life (Buttel and McMichael 1988), and this has contributed to the minority status of agricultural studies in the academy. World-system analysis has not been immune to this particular institutional bias, despite the powerful critique offered by Wallerstein of nineteenth-century social theory and its legacy of "developmentalism" (see, e.g. Wallerstein 1991). Developmentalism has been associated with industrialization on a country-by-country basis. The current proliferation of global manufacturing systems, however, scrambles *national* developmentalism by discounting (national) place and privileging global markets in money, labor, and goods. The resulting perception of a "developmentalist illusion" (Arrighi 1990) derives from historical insights such as Wallerstein's that "development" is a (national) organizing myth that has enslaved and obscured the vision of modern social science (Taylor 1987). This postmodern critique clearly presaged current concerns with social and environmental sustainability on a world scale.

The critique is located in Wallerstein's historical analysis. In the first of several volumes tracing the history of *The Modern World-System* from the sixteenth

century, Wallerstein relates the rise of the absolute monarchies in England and France to what he terms the “peripheralization” of Eastern Europe and Hispanic America (1974). He argues that the Atlantic powers, emerging as centers of world commerce and manufacturing, with intensive systems of contractual agricultural labor, were complemented, and provisioned, by coerced cash-crop systems: the so-called second serfdom of grain producers on Eastern European estates, slavery on sugar production, and the *encomienda* system, which was used to control labor in Peruvian mines or Guatemalan indigo plantations. That is, the different forms of agricultural labor across the world-economy signify two central dynamics: first, an unequal division of world labor exists, and, second, the forms of agricultural labor are correlated with the relative strength of states (understood not just in politico-military terms, but also in terms of state capacity to coordinate complementary economies—whether mercantile, imperial, or national). And this has a critical corollary: The most powerful states have historically gained the capacity to set the rules, not only of international commerce, but also of discourse, including the discourse of industrial development, as the fetish of modern national civilizations. For Wallerstein, developmentalism—the master narrative of modern social thought—stems from the social organization of the world-economy. It has accordingly shaped theories of social change, relegating food/agriculture to the margins.

It is not, however, simply a question of industrial fetishism. A more fundamental issue is the general rationalization of humanity associated with the “endless accumulation” of capital (Wallerstein 1984; Sayer 1991). Central to this is the increasing subordination of the material world and its self-conceptions to exchange value, as all things assume a price and modern culture submits to the calculus of value. Market rationality, however, has its own limits because its universalist claims are contested—whether because the sinews of social life (labor, land, and money) cannot be fully commodified (Polanyi 1957), or because value relations have always depended on nonvalue relations (such as patriarchal arrangements, or nonwage labor relations), or because non-Western entities (states or ethnonational or subnational movements) do not embrace the imperial implications of market rationality (see, e.g., Cheru 1989; Watkins 1991). In these arenas of contested meanings lie perhaps the renewed focus on agricultural and environmental sustainability, the preservation of food cultures and food security, and, therefore, the growing interest in understanding the global dimensions of food and agricultural systems.

ORGANIZATION OF CONTENTS

These chapters reflect these interests, ranging from analyses of power and meaning in the construction and reconstruction of social diets, through situating agriculture within long-term movements of the world capitalist economy, to spatial and regulatory shifts in the organization of contemporary agro-food production systems. The table of contents of this volume follows these lines of inquiry.

The first part, “Food in World-Historical Perspective,” includes three chapters that examine the process of large-scale dietary construction from symbolic, political, and technological angles. The first two chapters arose from the conference organizer’s attempt to establish a dialogue concerning the multiple dimensions of power in food production and consumption—both Sidney Mintz and Harriet Friedmann were asked to address special conference sessions on the topics of their contribution. Sidney Mintz discusses the power relations that configure food preferences. He links large-scale power relations associated with the supply of specific foods and the cognitive and symbolic aspects of consumption, suggesting a mutual conditioning of structural changes and consumers’ reordering of their categories of meaning. Harriet Friedmann addresses the related question of why the relations of food production and consumption assume such contemporary significance, anchoring it in the Polanyian cycle between societal self-protection and (current) market self-regulation. Superimposed on this cycle are structural trends associated with transnational corporate forms of capital accumulation, the political decline of farm sectors, and the transformation of work and consumption relations—all of which proffer new possibilities for exiting the cycle via new, localized forms of democratic regulation. The third chapter in this section, by Susan Thompson and Tadlock Cowan, reevaluates the role of “durable foods” in global food relations, through a case study of canned seafood’s strategic role in provisioning military forces and industrial proletarians during the rise of the capitalist world-economy.

The second part, “Agriculture in World-Historical Perspective,” juxtaposes Ravi Palat’s controversial reconsideration of the historical implications of wet-rice cultivation, with Resat Kasaba and Faruk Tabak’s long-term, world-systemic perspective on the sources of the collapse of the modern agrarian order. Each chapter deploys agriculture to reframe questions about world-historical social change. Palat argues that the specificities of Asian wet-rice cultivation and its reproductive networks precluded the development of agrarian capitalism, thereby challenging the Eurocentric views that capitalism was as indigenous to Asia as it was to Europe. Kasaba and Tabak examine three overlapping cycles of the world-system in the last 200-odd years—a cyclical movement of agricultural prices, the Columbian exchange between “Old” and “New Worlds” of wheat and maize, and the rise and fall of the British and American hegemonies—arguing that these, rather than simply the institutions of U.S. hegemony, stand behind the current reconfiguration of the world division of labor.

The third part, “Contemporary Agro-Food Complexes,” consists of case studies of the spatial and institutional organization of four (now) universal foodstuffs: the pervasive additive carrageenan, wine, coffee, and shrimp. Lanfranco Blanchetti-Revelli’s chapter examines the relocation of seaweed production as the outcome of a corporate reconstruction of the inputs to the carrageenan industry. The year-round cultivation of seaweed in the Philippines displaced former natural seaweed beds in Eastern Canada, illustrating the contradictory dynamics of global sourcing and its organization by transnational corporate processors. Walter Goldfrank and Roberto

and Miguel Korzeniewicz analyze the differential success of Argentina and Chile in replacing import-substitution industrial policies with exports of such nontraditional products as fresh fruits and wine, as a strategy of negotiating zonal structures in the global wine commodity complex. John Talbot's discussion of the tropical commodity complex, centered in coffee, extends Friedmann's three postwar food complexes of wheat, meat, and durable foods. He insists on the importance of a fourth complex: the tropical commodity complex. Not only does this complex represent the remaining colonial division of labor in the postcolonial world, but also its producer states deploy cartels and alliances with local capital to constrain transnational corporate control of world markets. Finally, Mike Skladany and Craig Harris consider the role of transnational firms in reorganizing the exploding global shrimp industry along scientific lines (the "blue revolution"), emphasizing the regulatory problems associated with the occupation of (formerly common) swamp-lands and wetlands.

The final part, "Recomposition of Global and Regional Agro-Food Systems," examines some of the key contemporary mechanisms of restructuring. Fran Ufkes focuses on the role of the Singapore state in industrial upgrading in the 1980s. Part of this strategy involves relocating pork production for the Singapore market to agro-export platforms in surrounding Southeast Asia, and retaining well-regulated agrotechnology parks in a strategy of repositioning Singapore within the (globalized) regional economy. Jane Collins follows with an examination of the restructuring of global labor forces for agribusiness, critiquing the presumption that women's labor in fruit and vegetable production is flexible and politically quiescent. Ramon Grosfoguel situates Caribbean depeasantization within the confluence of decolonization and postwar transformation of the international division of labor. This has involved the undermining of agrarian structures and the promotion of nonagricultural development, reinforced, at the household level, by remittances from labor migrants in the United States. The concluding chapter, by Robert Schaeffer, recovers the global view, detailing the implications of current free trade agreements, including GATT and NAFTA, for agro-environmental sustainability. Further, the movement toward supranational regulatory mechanisms not only privileges transnational corporations, but also disaggregates the interstate system thereby seriously reducing poorer states' access to multilateral and bilateral concessional trade and aid.

CONCEPTUAL THREADS

Alternatively, this volume is also framed by three conceptual threads, with distinct analytical foci: the world-system, food regimes, and global commodity chains. In many respects these foci parallel Fernand Braudel's three social times: the *longue durée*, political/institutional conjunctures, and the event (Braudel 1972). Their field of vision normally involves distinct explanatory purposes, even though ideally we would envisage these social times (and forces) as mutually conditioning, as Braudel would have it. Certainly these foci are intellectual

relatives, but nonetheless in practice they seek their own level. The exemplar of world-system analysis is the chapter by Kasaba and Tabak, which traces the processes involved in the construction and reconstruction of world agrarian orders. These are the cycles mentioned above (prices, growth/contraction in productive and geographical terms, and hegemony), cycles that constitute and express world-system dynamics. The overriding emphasis, on the contribution of these dynamics to cereal production concentration in the core zones of the world-economy in the post-World War II era, follows the aforementioned Wallersteinian specification of a world division of labor as the framework of modern social action, and hence of analysis.

Food regime analysis focuses on the state/capital nexus, examining the relations of food production and consumption that condition the restructuring of the interstate system and industrial capitalist social relations (Friedmann and McMichael 1989). Thus, in the late nineteenth century, the first food regime formed through the relocation of capitalist agriculture to the New World, as the new site of temperate food production for industrializing Europe. That is, increasingly capitalized settler agriculture cheapened the provisioning of metropolitan proletarians with grain and meat exports (Friedmann 1978). At the same time it anchored, outside of Europe, a new form of nationally organized state and economy (McMichael 1984). Following the interwar crisis of the twentieth century, U.S.-inspired world-economic reconstruction via decolonization established the national model of accumulation as a social *ideal*, based on agro-industrial integration and regulated through the Bretton Woods institutional complex. Food companies internationalized such integration, outgrowing subsidized metropolitan farm sectors associated with postwar Fordism. The latter incorporated consumption relations into accumulation, transforming food from a low-cost input of the wage-relation to an input in an industrial food complex servicing a high-wage consumer economy. The condition of this was the peculiar status of agriculture as a protected sector, removed from GATT consideration, and yet organized to overproduce—first in the United States and then in Europe as a consequence of the Marshall Plan-guided reconstruction of national farm sectors (Cleaver 1977; Block 1977). The increasingly competitive disposal of these managed surpluses contributed to the long-term undermining of peripheral agricultures. Ultimately this process was rooted in the world-historical dynamic of settler agricultural capitalism, which rivaled tropical exports via technological substitution (e.g., corn syrup for sugar) and domestic agricultures via trade substitution (Friedmann 1993).

The food regime perspective informs the chapters written by Friedmann, Thompson and Cowan, Talbot, and Ufkes. Thompson and Cowan periodize their discussion of industrial (canned) foods as midwife to the organization of the world-economy and the transition from preserved to wholly manufactured foods characteristic of the postwar food regime. Friedmann ponders the political implications of the breakdown of the postwar food regime as symptomatic of a more fundamental transformation in political organization and social life. Talbot

identifies, in the tropical commodity complex, a counterforce to globalization in the specifically Third World state-capital alliance against transnational food company control of world agriculture. And Ufkes locates “industrial greening” in Singapore within the global disorder attending the breakdown of Bretton Woods and the postwar food regime, intensifying organization of food production and consumption relations on a global scale.

The third thread is that of global commodity chains. Commodity chain analysis, which facilitates mapping of the world division of labor (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986), has been elaborated in the sixteenth annual PEWS conference volume (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994). This more directly empirical line of inquiry lends itself to short-term analysis. It traces the links among labor and production processes geared toward the creation of a finished product. While such links have always operated globally, they have arguably become more complex and fluid in the present world conjuncture, destabilizing conditions for producers and states, especially in the Third World (Raynolds et al. 1993). The existence of global commodity chains privileges transnational companies, whose operations more evidently pivot on a global labor force (Frobel, Heinrichs, and Kreye, 1979), and on the infinite possibilities of global sourcing of components. Chapter 6 illustrates the corporate reorganization of the carrageenan commodity chain, and chapters 7 and 9 illustrate the limits and possibilities of state regulation of global commodity chains—either as strategies of world-economic positioning, or of containing transnational corporate power in the interests of regulation of local labor markets or environments.

CONCLUSION

The collective emphasis of this volume is that we are not studying agricultural and food systems in different parts of the world so much as coming to grips with how the world is in fact constituted and reconstituted around such systems. And if agriculture and food have languished in the shadow of manufacturing and finance in world-economic accounts of power and historical transformations, this is evidently no longer the case. As critical inputs to the wage-relation, and/or as the basis for local survival in material and cultural senses, agriculture and food are central to the tensions in the process of globalization. In a world in which the limits of the industrial paradigm are fast becoming apparent, we are rediscovering the historic fact that control of land and food has been fundamental to the political equation—within and among states on the one hand, and through the construction and reconstruction of diets on the other hand. The passage, through this century, from agrarian question to food/green question now appears to be undergoing a radical reversal. That is, global movements resisting the corporate-sponsored self-regulated market ideal are seeking to reintegrate these historically separated questions.

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PART I

Food in World-Historical Perspective

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1

Food and Its Relationship to Concepts of Power

Sidney Mintz

Grace to Be Said at the Supermarket

That God of ours, the Great Geometer,
Does something for us here, where He hath put
 (if you want to put it that way) things in shape,
Compressing the little lambs in orderly cubes,
Making the roast a decent cylinder,
Fairing the ellipsoid of a ham,
Getting the luncheon meat anonymous
In squares and oblongs with the edges beveled
Or rounded (streamlined, maybe, for greater speed).
Praise Him, He hath conferred aesthetic distance
Upon our appetites, and on the bloody
Mess of our birthright, our unseemly need,
Imposed significant form. Through Him the brutes
Enter the pure Euclidean kingdom of number,
Free of their bulging and blood-swollen lives
They come to us holy, in cellophane
Transparencies, in the mystical body,
That we may look unflinchingly on death
As the greatest good, like a philosopher should.

—Howard Nemerov

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents my view of how a society learns to consume food differently: eating more food (or less), eating different food, differently prepared, in

different contexts, with the social (and perhaps the nutritive) purpose of the consumption itself revised or modified. My aims are roughly to block out, on the one hand, the sorts of constraint that define the situations within which people accept the need to change their food habits and, on the other, to illustrate how they cope with change cognitively and symbolically, by constructing new frames of consumption with modified meanings.

The use and application of power enters into many such instances of change. Where this power originates, how it is applied and with what ends, and in what manner people undertake to deal with it are all part of what happens. Even though they are of immense importance to the world's future, we do not understand these processes at all well. Furthermore, much of the research on changing food habits does not address the cultural aspects of such changes. Group values and past practices can figure significantly in what changes are made, how many and how fast. Thus culinary history enters into the success and failure of new applications of power in the sphere of food and eating, but not in readily understood or carefully studied ways. I attempt here to explain, in a preliminary fashion, my own ideas of how power serves to advance (or retard) changes in food habits.

SUGAR, TEA, AND THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS

The heightened use of tea, sugar, tobacco, and a few other substances, which came to typify the use and spending habits of the eighteenth-century British working class, probably provides us with the first instance in history of the *mass* consumption of imported food staples (Mintz 1985). Although the hope in *Sweetness and Power* (Mintz 1985) was to be able to explain the peculiar attraction these novelties had for new consumers, the argument remained incomplete in part because it was impossible to locate and isolate some specific single cause for this new consumption. Many explanations had turned up in the literature; none seemed particularly convincing. Two historians, sniffing the air anew, settled on "the quest for respectability" as *the* cause (Austen and Smith 1990; Smith 1992). Respectability, concrete and specific though it sounds, does not take us far. We still do not really know why so many English people so rapidly became such eager consumers of sugar and tea, for example. The term "respectability" can be an umbrella for such themes as hospitality, generosity, propriety, sobriety, social rivalry, and much else (Mintz 1993). The unanswered (and perhaps unanswerable) question persists if what we aim at explaining is the peculiar power of a *specific* food (or even some category of foods) over consciousness and will. Among possible factors influencing the British adoption of sugar, I earlier noted the powerful stimulant contained in tea and other new beverages, coffee and chocolate, with which sugar was consumed; the malnutrition of the British working classes at the time, such that the caloric contribution of sugar would matter unconsciously as well as consciously; the apparently universal predisposition of the human species toward the sweet taste;

the readiness of people in most (if not all) societies to emulate their “superiors” if permitted; the possible significance of the element of novelty; and the usefulness of tobacco and the stimulant beverages in easing the industrial work day (Mintz 1985). Faced with such a list, it becomes harder to talk about the relationship between food and power in terms of some single specific food.

The emergence of British sugar-eating and tea-drinking took place against a background of overseas expansion and colonial conquest: mounting commerce in enslaved Africans and growing plantations in the colonies and increasing industrialization, dislodgement of rural populations, and urbanization at home. Sugar itself, earlier a rare and precious imported medicine and spice, became cheaper (at first rapidly, then more gradually), while it did, the uses to which it might be put proliferated. Sugar’s increasing availability facilitated the increase in contexts within which it might be used.

Once sugar began to be consumed by those of modest income, its application increased swiftly. It entered into the rhythms of daily life particularly in its association with the three new stimulant beverages (in Britain, tea soon emerged as the most successful). Much later, and by a series of successive steps, sugar became important in its own right—that is to say, other than in association with these beverages.

MEANING

In studying materials dealing with home and work conditions in Britain in relation to sugar and other substances, it was useful to separate the broad changes in background that made access to sugar easier, on the one hand, and the circumstances of daily domestic life and work, within which consumers installed sugar in their everyday routines, on the other. On this basis, two terms were proposed to simplify discussion. The daily life conditions of consumption had to do with “inside meaning”; the environing economic, social, political (even military) conditions, with “outside meaning.”

Inside meaning arises when the grand changes connected with outside meaning are already under way. These grand changes ultimately set the outer boundaries for determining hours of work, places of work, mealtimes, buying power, child care, spacing of leisure, and the arrangement of time in relation to the expenditure of human energy. In spite of their significance for everyday life, they originate outside that sphere and on a wholly different level of social action. In consequence of these changes, however, individuals, families, and social groups must busily integrate what are newly acquired behaviors into daily or weekly practice, thereby turning the unfamiliar into the familiar, imparting additional meaning to the material world, and employing and creating significance at the most humble levels. This is what happened to tea-drinking, once people had tasted tea and were learning to drink it regularly, and what happened to pipe-smoking, once tobacco had been tried and was liked. People alter the micro-conditions as much as they can and according to their emerging prefer-

ences—the where, when, how, with whom, with what, and why—thereby changing what the things in question signify, what they *mean* to the users. New behaviors are superimposed upon older behaviors; some behavioral features are retained, others forgone. New patterns replace older ones.

This happens, however, within the widest constraints that outside meaning permits. The processes that endow behavior with inside meaning unfold in relation to what I label “grand changes.” But, of course, for the participants the micro-conditions themselves are, or become, grand—for it is out of them that the routines of daily life are fashioned. This interior embedding of significance in the activity of daily life, with its specific associations (including affective associations) for the actors, is perhaps what anthropologists have in mind when they talk about meaning in culture.

Some of us tend to be inordinately moved by the power of our species to invest life with meaning on this intimate, immediate, and homely level. It is essential to stress the remarkable—even distinctive—capacity of our species to construct, and act in terms of, symbols. But in the case of the large, complex societies with which we deal today, it is at least as important to complete understanding to keep in mind that larger institutional subsystems usually set the terms against which these meanings in culture are silhouetted. In daily practice, for example, job opportunities tell people when they can eat and how long they can take to do it; to a noticeable extent, they also therefore tell people what they can eat, where, and with whom. Individuals are thus presented with a series of situations within which they may begin to make meaningful constructions for themselves, as long as such constructions do not violate the outer situational boundaries created for them. But the job opportunities are determined by forces that transcend the means and wills of those who become the employees—as anyone who has lost a job recently knows.

In contrast to inside meaning, it is those larger forces expressed in particular subsystems, together with the state, that have to do with what I meant by the term “outside meaning.” Thus, outside meaning refers to the wider social significance of those changes effectuated by institutions and groups whose reach and power transcend both individuals and local communities: those who staff and manage the larger economic and political institutions and make them operate.

In the case of the history of sugar in Britain, it was the servants of the imperial political and economic system who carved out the West Indian colonies and gave them governments; saw to the successful—immense and centuries-long—importation of enslaved Africans to the islands; bequeathed land wrested from the indigenes to the first settlers; financed and managed the ever-rising importation of tropical goods to Britain, including chocolate, coffee, cotton, and tobacco, as well as sugar, rum, molasses, tea, and much else; and levied taxes at all levels of society to benefit its servants and the state. It will soon become clear that these background arrangements of conditions against which inside meaning can take on its

characteristic shape—what I call outside meaning—are cognate with what Eric Wolf has labeled “structural power” (Wolf 1990, 586–87).

To have used the word “meaning,” rather than “power,” in the first of my labels (“outside meaning”) may have been somewhat misleading, but there was a reason for it at the time (Mintz 1985). For a decade or two, anthropologists have gradually been abandoning an older interest in causation—in trying to explain why *this* happened, rather than *that*—in order to make analyses of events in terms of what is thought to be their meaning. We are told that such a shift in emphasis has had the salutary effect of bringing the ethnographer into view and of demystifying both the ethnographer and the fieldwork situation (though neither is a genuinely new idea).

But the stress on meaning has also led us away from seeking to explain what happens (or happened) in the course of human events. We know that particular events often *mean* different things to different persons or groups in the same society. The slave trade and slavery “meant” that the British factory and farm workers would get their sugar; however, the meaning of slavery and the slave trade to plantation owners, bankers, and the Colonial Office was entirely different. (One need hardly add that, for the slaves and their descendants, it also “meant” quite different things.) For anthropologists still interested in how things happen and the consequences of events, there has to be a way to distinguish among different meanings, and different sorts of meaning, in order to continue to study causation. The abstract system we call a culture, as well as the abstract system of meaning thought to typify the members of the society who share that culture, are neither simple coefficients of each other, nor two sides of one coin, nor merely the active and passive aspects of one system. To treat them as if they were is to bypass the complex nature of any society and to impute to its members a homogeneity of value and intentions they almost certainly lack. Outside meaning was a term invented to avoid the imputation of any such homogeneity.

As for inside meaning, the term “meaning” is entirely appropriate here, I think. Those who create such inside meaning do so by imparting significance to their own acts and the acts of those around them, in the fashion in which human beings have been giving their behavior such social significance as long as they have been human. The gradual emergence of a food pattern called “high tea” among working-class Britons was the work of those who eventually came to take this meal regularly; it was they who created the pattern. But they did so inside the constraints of work and income and their own available energy, constraints over which they themselves had hardly any control at all.

The connection between outside and inside meaning can be exemplified with a more modern case than that of sugar and tea in eighteenth-century Britain. But before looking at this case, we need to take note of a general paradox having to do with the whole issue of food and food preferences. On the one hand, food preferences, once established, are usually deeply resistant to change. We cannot easily imagine the Chinese people giving up rice to eat white bread, or the

Russian people black bread to eat maize. Such deeply cherished tastes are rooted in underlying economic and social conditions, and they are surely far more than simply nutritive. But they must also be viewed in terms of the equally telling fact that *some* preferences, even in diet, turn out in fact to be quite readily surrendered. To be sure, it is far more common to add new foods to one's diet than it is to forgo old and familiar ones. The readiness of North Americans to become eaters of *sushi*, which surely could not have been predicted in 1941—and not only for political reasons—is an apt example of an unexpected, even unpredictable adding-on. Somewhat more interesting in the present argument is the gradual decline in the consumption of complex carbohydrates by North Americans over the past seventy-five years, which has meant not just the addition of new foods, but also a palpable decline in the consumption of certain once-prized old ones. In any event, these additions-on and gradual eliminations are often hard to explain for they proceed against substantial, persisting stability of diet at the same time.

We do not understand at all well why it can be claimed both that people cling tenaciously to familiar old foods, yet readily replace some of them with others. Hence situations of rapid change in food habits deserve a much closer look than they have received. We need to know far better than we do now why some food habits change easily and swiftly, while others are remarkably enduring. We are inclined to view this contrast as between basic or essential foods on the one hand, and less important or peripheral foods on the other. But this is not adequate to explain all particular cases of rapid change. When much else is changing, food habits may change, too, and such changes are often unpredictable. Where and how power enters into these processes of change, projected in part against continuing stability, is not always apparent.

A CASE

Here, then, is one example of how such changes may work to affect food choices. This large-scale, general case has to do with war. War is probably the single most powerful instrument of dietary change in human experience. In time of war, both civilians and soldiers are regimented—in modern times, more even than before. There can occur at the same time terrible disorganization and (some would say) terrible organization. Food resources are mobilized, along with other sorts of resources. Large numbers of persons are assembled to do things together—ultimately, to kill together. While learning how, they must eat together. Armies travel on their stomachs; generals—and now economists and nutritionists—decide what to put in them. They must do so while depending upon the national economy and those who run it to supply them with what they prescribe or, rather, they prescribe what they are told they can rely upon having.

During World War II, upwards of fifteen million Americans were brought together in uniform, many millions more in mufti. The service people ate together in large camps. They ate what they were given; what they were given

was decided by power holders who functioned outside the army and outside their direct experience.

Among other things, service personnel were given meat twenty-one times a week; even the Friday dinner had an alternate meat course (though it was usually cold cuts). For most soldiers (but only irregularly under combat conditions), never before had so much meat been thrust before them. They were also given vast quantities of coffee and sweets of all sorts; there were sugar bowls on every table and twice a day, without fail, the meal ended with dessert. Soldiers were also given free cigarettes in the pay line each month (by a ruse that lined the pockets of some noncommissioned officers). Though the food habits of the civilians may not have been so radically altered, certain things did happen, about which much is known. Civilians got too little meat; the wartime media were full of stories and jokes about romancing the butcher. They got too little sugar, too little coffee, and too little tobacco. Their food habits were also being radically affected. Hence North American food preferences—though “preferences” may seem slightly misleading, under the circumstances—were significantly reshaped by the war experience.

Among the things that soldiers and civilians were *not* given was Coca Cola, but it was carefully arranged that they could buy it. George Catlett Marshall, chief of staff during World War II, was a southerner. Soon after Pearl Harbor General Marshall advised all of his commanders and general officers to request Coca Cola bottling plants in order to get the product to the front. By his letter Marshall gave Coca Cola the same status in the wartime economy as that occupied by food and munitions. Coca Cola was thus spared sugar rationing. In all, sixty-four Coca Cola plants were established in allied theaters of war, including the Pacific theater, North Africa, Australia, and elsewhere. The Coca Cola Company was asked by the armed forces to supply technicians to run the production; 148 bottling plant technicians were sent; three were even killed in theaters of war during World War II (Louis and Yazijian 1980).

In the light of Coca Cola’s status by the time the war ended, it is noteworthy that, before the war, Coke was not only not much of an international drink—it was not even much of a national drink. Though Coke had traveled early in its career to Cuba, it was still principally a U.S. beverage, consumed mainly in the South. It was sold in some foreign countries, but it certainly was not well known internationally. In most places in the United States where Coke was drunk, high school students laced it with Southern Comfort whiskey so that they could get publicly (yet covertly) intoxicated at the senior prom. Indeed, it is probable that most people outside the South never drank Coke, but “mixed” it instead. During the war, the fact that the U.S. professional officer corps was largely southern may have played a role in this story, as well.

How outside meaning was associated with the *spread* of Coca Cola is easy to discern. The rapid proliferation of Coca Cola bottling plants in allied theaters of war speaks directly to the issue. Power over labor and resources employed in the production of food undergirded the unhampered operation of the corporate

system, closely coordinated in this instance with the will of the state. Even in times of politico-military crisis—some might say particularly in such times—corporate power neatly integrated with the state bureaucracy firmly underwrites the successful execution of broader societal tasks. At such moments, the power of the state itself seems far less irksome to corporate America. The deployment of resources for food production is linked to conceptions of consumer choice as well. But in this instance the choices were managed in a specific fashion: 95 percent of all soft drinks sold on American bases during the war were products of the Coca Cola Company. There was choice, but one company was accorded the right to specify its limits.

In contrast to outside meaning, inside meaning in a case of this kind has to do with what foods come to mean to those who consume them. The symbolism connected with Coca Cola, as it took on its national stature during the war, was utterly astonishing: The first bottle to come ashore at Anzio, for instance, was shared by nineteen GIs. It was not unusual to find in the letters that servicemen wrote home the assertion that they were fighting for the right to drink Coca Cola. The inside meaning of Coca Cola is certainly revealed in the emotions of a soldier who fights—among other things—“as much to help keep the custom of drinking Cokes as I am to help preserve the millions of other benefits our country blesses its citizens with”—to quote from one of many such references to Coke in the censored mail of wartime. Thus it was that Coca Cola was enabled to become a symbol—a veritable national symbol—among the warrior youth of the 1940s generation.

War, then, is a setting in which the exercise of the power behind outside meaning readily applies. Such examples do not have to do with the intrinsic nutritive significance of food. They help to explain, rather, how outside processes serve to impose many of the conditions within which inside meaning can take shape and manifest itself.

CONCLUSIONS

In his lecture to the American Anthropological Association annual meetings some years ago, Eric Wolf enumerated four sorts of power (Wolf 1990). By Wolf's reckoning there is, first of all, personal power, of a sort comparable to charisma. Second, there is the power of persuasion, by means of which one person exacts conformance of some kind from another. Third, and on a broader canvas, there is the “power that controls the settings in which people may show forth their potentialities and interact with others” (1990, 586). This “tactical or organizational power” is “useful for understanding how ‘operating units’ circumscribe the actions of others within determinate settings.” Tactical power can be used, for example, by organized business entities, such as multinational corporations, banks, and conglomerates. The exercise of such power is tightly linked to the current argument. Even more important is Wolf's last category:

a fourth mode of power, power that not only operates within settings or domains but that also organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves, and that specifies the distribution and direction of energy flows. I think that this is the kind of power that Marx addressed in speaking about the power of capital to harness and allocate labor power. . . . I want to use it as power that structures the political economy. I will refer to this kind of power as structural power. This term rephrases the older notion of "the social relations of production," and is intended to emphasize power to deploy and allocate social labor. These governing relations do not come into view when you think of power primarily in interactional terms. Structural power shapes the field of action so as to render some kinds of behavior possible, while making others less possible or impossible. (1990, 586–87)

When this perspective is applied to the subject of food habits, it is easy to see how structural and tactical (or organizational) power undergird the institutional frameworks that set the terms by which people get food, maintain or change their eating habits, and either perpetuate their eating arrangements and the associated meaning or build new systems, with new meanings, into those arrangements.

All living organisms are faced with an imperious necessity: not to eat is to die. But beyond this, foods have meanings that transcend their nutritive role. Just as our species seems always to have made food carry symbolic loads far heavier than those of simple nutrition, so, too, the symbolism seems ready to spill over into even wider fields of meaning. The place of rice in Japanese culture, of bread in the West, of maize to many Native American peoples—these significations clearly surmount any literal nutritive significance the foods themselves might have.

It might seem acceptable to say, then, that food exercises "power" over people in terms of what it means to them. But that is *not* the sort of power with which this author is dealing, and it is important to be clear in this regard. The material world is invested with meaning; because people act in terms of understood meanings, meaning can be said to effectuate behaviors of certain kinds. Power and meaning are always connected. "Power is . . . never external to signification," Wolf writes, "it inhabits meaning and is its champion in stabilization and defense" (1990, 593). But the symbolic power of foods, like the symbolic power of dress or coiffure, is different from (even if related in some manner to) the tactical and structural power that sets the outermost terms for the creation of meaning. The power within outside meaning sets terms for the creation of inside, or symbolic, meaning.

Turn again to the words of that earnest GI who fought to preserve his right to drink Coke. There is no question about inside meaning in this instance. Such inside meaning is linked to outside meaning because what Coke *means* is co-efficient with its history as a commodity, with the steps taken to ensure its availability, with the history of those very decisions by which Coke could become the purchased soft drink, the tie to home, the exciter of nostalgia, the

symbol of America. What I have called outside meaning and inside meaning are clearly linked in Coke's story, but they are clearly different from each other, and they do not stand in any simple relationship.

In his own work, Wolf has set apart the issue of meaning from the issue of power, but he sees them as inextricably connected: "Meanings are not imprinted into things by nature; they are developed and imposed by human beings. Several things follow from this. The ability to bestow meanings—to 'name' things, acts and ideas—is a source of power" (1982, 388).

As this chapter attempts to suggest, the ability to "supply" things, in the broadest sense, is also a vital source of power, not only because it may include some ability to bestow meaning, but also because meaning coalesces around certain relationships. Objects, ideas, and persons take on a patterned structural unity in the creation of ritual, as happened, for example, when high tea became a working-class eating custom. But it was the purveyors of the foods, the givers of employment, the servants of the state who exercised the power that made the foods available.

If we return briefly to the case of sugar in eighteenth-century Britain, we may inquire of the material to what extent the creators of the background conditions can be said to have set the precise terms for the emergence of inside meaning. Emulation, for example, played some role in increasing and in shaping use; so, probably, did medical advice. The conditions under which landless people worked were determined by others: the hours when they might eat or rest, where they took their food, how they got to and from work. At the level of daily life, the customary practices that working people developed in order to deal with the newly emerging industrial society in which they found themselves were answers, or "solutions" to conditions over which they had no real control. In these ways, outside and inside meanings are linked through the conditions created and presented to potential consumers by those who supply what is to be consumed.

This chapter has aimed at clarifying these questions, not at answering them seriously. What is needed is a concerted effort to study the various ways in which stable food habits can be called into question. We may also ask ourselves *why* they are called into question. Some answers may have to do with poor nutrition, overeating, or inordinately expensive cuisine, relative to available resources. But other answers may have little or nothing to do with health or economy, even though people are being subjected to intense pressures to forgo some parts of their diet in favor of different foods. At times, as has been suggested here, large-scale structural changes, such as war and migration, may change the rules of the game, so to speak, compelling people to reorder their categories of meaning in new ways, and to eat (and drink) differently. How this is done, and why it succeeds, badly needs to be understood. So, too, do all of the means used to persuade people that what they are eating now should be replaced with something else. I think that it is within anthropology's capabilities to confront these issues solidly, but it has not done so. Until it tries to accomplish

this, it will not be able to contribute fully what it can to our understanding of the world food problem.

NOTE

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