



# Reimagining Marginalized Foods

Global Processes,  
Local Places

EDITED BY  
Elizabeth Finnis



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# REIMAGINING MARGINALIZED FOODS



# Introduction

Elizabeth Finnis

This volume offers a series of ethnographic considerations of the ways marginal foods may be reimagined in the process of bringing them to mainstream consumers. When we use the term *marginal*, we specifically refer to distinct foods and culinary practices that have tended to be associated with peripheral or non-elite populations and cultural groups; these may include indigenous cultures, migrants, or local groups that have been, at least officially, subsumed by notions of one coherent, national, and dominant whole. In discussing marginal foods and non-elite populations, we consider how marginality plays out in specific locales and times, and the multiple ways—cultural, social, economic, geographic, and political—it may be manifested and articulated. The contributors to this volume engage with a number of questions relating to food and marginality, including, How are foods symbolically repackaged in the process of entering mainstream markets? What tensions emerge between new representations of foods and local cultural meanings? and, How do processes of reimagining crops and cuisines intersect with notions of authenticity, identity, inclusion and exclusion, the nation, and conservation?

Marginality is, of course, not an uncontested category. What is considered a marginal food at one time and place may be an everyday item in another location and during another period. A food that one group considers inedible, inappropriate, or low status may play important roles in dietary diversity or the creation and maintenance of social bonds, identity, and livelihoods for another. Similarly, what is understood as exotic and rare in one context may be associated with scarcity and poverty in another

(see, for example, Van Esterik 2006). The chapters in this volume discuss foods and cuisines that in one way or another are or have been considered marginal in whichever specific time and place is being considered. We examine how this marginality may be contested through the enacting of social, cultural, political, and commercial practices or consumption performances that attempt to move foods to more symbolically or physically central locations in local and national food behaviors.

The incorporation of marginal foods and culinary practices into mainstream consumption behaviors requires more than the simple introduction of products and tastes to new consumers. Foods and cuisines may need to be reimagined and re-presented in strategic ways in order to garner public attention and interest, and to reconfigure their association with lower-status food practices (see, for example, Gutierrez 1984; Pilcher 2004). In this reimagining, specific agendas may be bolstered or created, longtime consumers may lose access to traditional food practices, or they may reclaim practices that had become unpopular or uncommon for a period of time. Foods and culinary practices may become ubiquitous within a new target market, even as they are modified to suit new tastes and merge with existing cuisines and consumption behaviors. Thus, the outcomes of reimagining “local” food practices and products for “nonlocal” populations can vary.

This volume is a result of discussions that began during a lively Culture and Agriculture-sponsored session at the 2008 American Anthropological Association meetings. The session brought together academic and non-academic participants to consider the ways that foods considered marginal or low status may be reconceptualized and reimagined in different cultural contexts by government officials, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or individuals as part of diverse identity, livelihood, political, and conservation projects. The chapters in this volume demonstrate some of the tensions, complexities, and inconsistencies in the ways marginal foods and cuisines are considered, and provide insights into how foods can be harnessed by diverse actors and organizations pursuing specific goals that may—or may not—reflect the priorities, practices, and preferences of the populations associated with these foods.

## Contemporary Food Contexts and Questions

Research into food and culinary practices and the systems in which they are embedded has a long history in anthropology, reflecting the reality that

human societies and individuals within those societies are preoccupied, to one degree or another, with the procurement, preparation, serving, and consumption of food; food is as much about cultural practices as it is about physical necessity. Anthropological research from across the sub-disciplines has demonstrated the rich and complicated ways that human groups have gone about creating, modifying, and transporting individual food commodities, food practices, or broader food systems, with both positive and negative consequences.

One approach to such research complements large-scale analyses of food systems and global economies with considerations of the local-level consequences of such economies. For example, Mintz's (1985) important work on the historical rise of global sugar consumption demonstrates how this phenomenon intersected with and shaped manifestations of economic, cultural, and political power and disempowerment; Schepers-Hughes (1993) shows the everyday implications of sugarcane plantations for the lives of impoverished and disempowered plantation workers in Brazil. Peltó and Peltó's (1983) analysis of historical trends towards dietary delocalization is complemented by Waldram's (1985) demonstration of the ways that hydroelectric dam development in Canada has contributed to the loss of local food resources among indigenous peoples, and of a food culture based on ideas of ecology and human-animal relationships.

Although anthropologists have had a long-standing interest in food production and consumption, there has been a relatively recent resurgence of food-related research within anthropology and other social science and humanities fields. This renewed interest reflects a number of contemporary issues. Public engagement with food-related issues is changing as contemporary concerns about food capture the public imagination and encourage public discourse and activism. Emerging and ongoing food crises in diverse nations; questions about health and nutrition and the tensions between over- and undernutrition; ongoing environmental change and degradation; questions about agro-biodiversity and global agricultural heritage; and the rising interest in preserving and maintaining diverse foods, culinary traditions, and tastes in the face of global homogenization of food practices are all contributing to public and academic discussions and actions that question food systems in everyday contexts. These can also translate into political or social movements that, as Pietrykowski (2004:319) points out, can "seek to come to terms with desire and pleasure of consumption" while also questioning systematic food inequities (see also Friedmann 2007; Reynolds 2000). In the global North, for example, increasing public and academic attention has focused on movements that

support local producers via farmers' markets, the social capital of 100-Mile Diet movements, and discussions about the ethics of eating and modes of agricultural production. Yet, food-related social movements are not limited to the global North. Movements to bring marginal foods to mainstream audiences in the global South can go hand in hand with attempts to rethink food systems, improve rural livelihoods, and question processes of environmental degradation (Finnis, this volume; Markowitz, this volume). Thus, food system changes offer the possibility and reality of the introduction—or reintroduction—of marginal foods to new markets.

The ethnographic contexts in this volume draw from both the global South and the global North. Though the settings are diverse, several theoretical and practical themes emerge. In his conclusion, John Brett explores some of the thematic issues that emerge throughout the volume, including issues of process, political economy, appropriation, and culture. Here, I will briefly address three additional themes that emerge throughout the book: (1) the ways that movement—both physical and symbolic—can play a key role in reimagining and re-presenting marginal foods; (2) the ways that food intersects with attempts to build identities, both local and national; and (3) marginality in public and private food consumption.

## **Moving Foods, Changing Ideals**

When populations move, ideas of taste, food preferences, culinary techniques, and other forms of food behavior necessarily move as well. In some cases this may entail leaving food practices behind. In others, it can mean taking food preferences and practices to new locations and modifying them as necessary to reflect new environments, access to new ingredients, and new livelihood practices (Wilk 2006a; see also Counihan 2004; Ray 2004; Vaneker, this volume).<sup>1</sup> Yet, there are other potential relationships between food and movement, including the movement of foods divorced from their cultural contexts and their economic associations (Van Esterik 2006). What happens when food and culinary practices are moved from the cultural or physical margins, and how are these movements facilitated, shaped, and used in terms of specific political, social, and cultural goals? How can these movements—sometimes accompanying specific populations and sometimes divorced from these populations in everything but rhetoric—change access to specific foods while drawing on underlying notions of identity and authenticity?

The chapters in this volume consider these questions and others, examining how movement from the margins can be both physical and

symbolic. Crops and dishes may be physically relocated from one geographical location to another, as when rare crops are transported to new physical market spaces or culinary practices are performed in a new country. However, “the margins” can also be symbolic spaces and social boundaries. As Richard Wilk discusses in his chapter, ideas about what is good to eat and what is not, or taste and distaste, can intersect with the creation of social boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Yet, the foods associated with inclusion, exclusion, taste, and distaste may change over time, which in turn may reshape social boundaries. This flux has implications for bringing a food from margin to center: certainly, doing so involves making that food physically and economically accessible, but that is not enough. Symbolic movements in the ways foods are conceptualized may become far more important in attempts to integrate a food or cuisine into mainstream food behaviors. In the process of attempted movements from periphery to center, or at least to a less marginal position, it may be necessary to symbolically reshape foods and culinary traditions; to re-present them to new markets as newly desirable. This may mean reimagining foods as valuable from numerous different standpoints: they may be presented, for example, as environmentally friendly, as inherently healthy, as representative of identity, or as reflecting complex and “authentic” tastes. Thus, processes may involve strategizing around diverse issues such as the representation of identity at local and national levels, the representation of political unity with voters, or the search for international cachet. This may entail revising entire cuisines and preparation traditions for a new audience in new spaces, as illustrated in Lois Stanford’s analysis of indigenous cuisine in Mexico, or it may be focused on individual food products, as addressed in Lisa Markowitz’s analysis of attempts to transform alpaca meat into a socially desirable food in Peru, and as I discuss in terms of the physical movement of millets from highland villages to lowland towns and cities in India. At the same time as these new meanings are being created, there can be a simultaneous (and often inadvertent) alteration of meanings among those populations who have traditionally prepared and consumed these foods and dishes.

Thus, the case studies in this volume examine the social and cultural distances of food (Wilk 2006a) in terms of physical distance as well as political, national, and cultural distances. If the meanings of foods and the systems in which they are produced are increasingly “unhinged” and decontextualized (Wilk 2006a:14) in contemporary contexts, it becomes necessary to examine cases where individuals, groups, governments, and nongovernmental organizations attempt to recontextualize meanings, sometimes in new and complex ways. Anthropological considerations of

why and how these processes occur in diverse cultural, social, political, and economic contexts provide insight into the complexities inherent in attempts to reimagine foods and food systems.

Research into decontextualization of the meanings of foods within increasingly complex global food systems has engaged with movements such as Slow Food and with ideas of locality, sustainability, and identity. Much of this work has been located in the global North and has encompassed a range of issues, including discourses around consumption and ideology at farmers' markets (Alkon 2008; Stanford 2006), fast food trends in Japan (Bestor 2006; Whitelaw 2006), the production of artisanal products in the face of changing food regulations and the process of *declaring* products artisanal (Leitch 2003; Paxon 2006) or as linked to (sometimes contested) national identities (Guy 2001; Jansen 2001), the integration and alteration of new cuisines in new locales (Möhring 2008; Smart 2003), and notions of food aesthetics and taste (Meneley 2004; Miele and Murdoch 2002). New food products and crops may also be conceptually reframed by drawing on notions of locality and historicity (Sonnino 2007).

Others have examined notions of identity and food in the global South, considering, for example, intersections of maize, tortillas, tacos, and authenticity in Mexico (Bordi 2006; Lind and Barham 2004); expressions of sociality and social values in Yap during a time of changing food access (Egan, Burton, and Nero 2006); the development of middle-class cuisine in Mali (Koenig 2006); and the ethnography of fast food in the Philippines (Matejowsky 2006). Nevertheless, there has thus far been limited consideration of the ways that foods and cuisines in the global South, or originating in the global South, are (re)conceptualized as local, and the ways that defining these foods as local subsequently allows them to be strategically used to pursue specific goals as defined by different levels of people who may consider themselves local. Moskowitz (2008) reminds us that definitions of local, regional, and global have changed over time with improved transportation technologies. Discussions about what it means to have a diet that is local, global, or a mix of global tastes and local resources, also contribute to academic and everyday understandings of these terms.

### **Food, Identities, and Situating “the Local”**

Food has more than subsistence or economic value. Humans as individuals cannot function without adequate access to nutrients; in turn, social and cultural groups maintain coherence and organization in part

via common food practices and beliefs. These may function at small-scale or larger levels, as do, for example, the popular North American notion that eating meals together helps maintain a sense of family and community (Humphrey and Humphrey 1988), beliefs about food taboos and social groups (Nichter and Nichter 1996), and the ways that food preferences play out and are developed in response to new products and accessibility (Möhring 2008; Shah 1983) or food shortages (Bentley 2001). Food may be a site for contesting social and economic systems and norms (Belasco 2000), or it may be a way to reaffirm, express, and celebrate identity (Kaplan 1988; Neustadt 1988).

What are some of the ways that identity, from the perspective of the individual, community, or nation, might connect with attempts to reimagine marginal foods or food practices? How does identity intersect with notions of belonging and locality? One approach to answering these questions involves considering *who* is attempting to make or reinforce strategic food–identity–locality links. Is the attempt to reimagine and integrate marginal foods coming from traditional producers or consumers? Are governments, power holders, or external organizations involved, or perhaps driving, the movement? What does the nature of the actor say about the resources that are available? As the chapters in this volume point out, the intersection of identity and marginal foods may be used strategically in different ways, depending on the actors involved. Outcomes are therefore linked to context, strategies, and access to resources.

This volume also demonstrates some of the diverse meanings of *local*: what the local can become, and how notions of local, authentic foods and cuisines can be harnessed in vastly different ways by people and organizations that have significantly different access to the resources crucial to marketing foods. Such local, traditional foods may evoke conflicting responses—potentially being both praised for having authentic roots, while also disparaged for being unsophisticated or otherwise problematic, complexities that Richard Wilk and Lisa Markowitz explore in their chapters. Claims of locality can be applied in attempts to fix a specific national identity in an international forum, or to both local and global audiences, as Lois Stanford and Lisa Markowitz discuss; or politicians and political activists may use foods to assert locality or ethnic identity, as markers of inclusion and exclusion, as Wini P. Utari demonstrates. As Karin Vaneker shows in her chapter, locality can play a role when foods from “afar” are integrated into national foodways; and, as I argue, food crops can be actively marketed as representing local heritage, even while being decoupled from the everyday practices of traditional producers and consumers.

Cristina Grasseni, in her discussion of the ways that production of Italian high-mountain cheese intersects with performances of other traditional practices such as spinning wool, points to the way images of local culture can be involved in a process of “self-folklorization.”<sup>2</sup> These processes involve engaging with and creating a social, economic, and political market for ideas of the authentic (Bendix 1997), which can involve not just food, but also the production of food.

In examining these issues, many of the chapters in this volume focus on foods and cuisines that are rooted in the global South and may be considered indigenous in the more-or-less common understanding of the term as being associated with groups who are considered indigenous or have claimed an indigenous identity. Other foods are being reimagined as representing a kind of “indigenous” location, in that they are being positioned as quintessentially associated with very localized populations and specific traditions, rather than being imposed by outside forces. The processes by which these foods and cuisines are being reclaimed may also involve a conceptual stepping back into older food practices in order to reclaim or rethink identities—thus, the re-presenting of marginalized foods to mainstream audiences can involve a strategic reconsideration of identities in both temporal and spatial terms.

### Private Foods, Public Spaces?

Such spatial issues also involve the ways that private and public spaces may intersect with notions of identity. Among migrants, the act of eating “ethnic foods” can serve to maintain ethnic identity when done in private, but may also take on notions of *reclaiming* ethnic identities when eaten (and served) in public (Neustadt 1988; Wilk 2006b; Utari, this volume). Markers of identity and tradition may also be privately enacted when it comes to the preparation of foods, even if the foods themselves will be served publicly to outsiders or tourists, something Lois Stanford discusses in terms of community feast days in Michoacán.

Public/private tensions around food may intersect with perceptions of status and public display (Wilk 2006a). As Wini P. Utari discusses in her chapter, eating *sinonggi* in private versus in public may hold different social meanings, depending on who is doing the eating, and why. The consumption of indigenous foods at festivals or functions attended by elites may signal an external show of support for emerging ideas of national

traditions and authenticity, as discussed by Lois Stanford in her chapter (see also McAndrews 2004 and Shortridge 2004 for discussions of food, festivals, and authenticity). This external support may however exist without a related ongoing, private support of the food production and cuisines of non-elites who practice these dietary norms on a day-to-day basis.

As several chapters in this volume demonstrate, one challenge actors may face when attempting to present marginal foods to mainstream consumers is that of moving from a public presentation of these foods—at festivals and markets, for example—to ongoing private consumption, or vice versa. The fact that a product becomes readily available in restaurants or upscale markets does not necessarily mean it will gain the social cachet that leads it to become regularly consumed in private spaces. The success of an attempt to take a marginal food into wider contexts may therefore depend on whether its symbolic status is effectively repositioned such that it straddles acts of public and private consumption.

Yet the process of changing accessibility of foods may also have implications for the private consumption of these foods among traditional consumers; bringing food to a new, mainstream audience does not necessarily mean that traditional consumers will continue to be readily able to access their food traditions. In other cases, marginal foods may become increasingly central to mainstream consumption behaviors, sometimes quickly and sometimes gradually (see Vaneker, this volume; Bentley 2004; Möhring 2008), processes that can be about both the “gastronomic memory of diaspora” (Holtzman 2006:367) and culinary integration and experimentation. This process can have implications for the standardization and routinization of taste and production practices, as Cristina Grasseni discusses in her consideration of the politics of authenticity surrounding high-mountain cheese in Italy (see also Bentley 2004; Leitch 2003).<sup>3</sup>

## **Towards a Consideration of “Marginal” Foods**

Anthropology and related disciplines have a long history of examining food and marginality in terms of access to food and of systemic changes that may create and maintain marginalized producers (for recent examples, see Barndt 2008; Clapp 2005; Flynn 2008; Pilcher 2006). Food, food security, and more recently, food sovereignty<sup>4</sup> are lenses through which we can examine individual and group experiences of being on the margins. The chapters in this volume demonstrate that an in-depth analysis of foods that

are considered marginal and non-elite can provide us with an approach to understanding how complex social, political, and economic practices intersect with the everyday lived experiences of marginality. This approach has implications for understanding the ways we experience the everyday, practical reordering and mixing of food traditions with new ideas, new priorities, and political-economic strategies (Wilk 2006b), as well as the enactment of, or shifts in, taste and distaste (Wilk, this volume). In this volume, we consider who plays what role in processes of reordering that bring foods from the margins to the center: which individuals, groups, and organizations participate in mixing notions of local, marginalized foods with other agendas and with specific conceptualizations of national identity, authenticity, environment, political power, and health. By offering context-specific responses to these and other questions, the contributors to this volume engage in theoretical and empirical discussions of the ways marginal foods, culinary traditions, and food systems intersect with identity, authenticity, and globalization, while also pointing to the practical challenges that may be faced by populations and groups engaged in these food practices that intersect with livelihoods and everyday behaviors. These issues necessarily raise broad questions about ethics and food. If questions of changing food systems, practices, and access are as much about ethics as they are about consumption, it becomes important to consider how reimagining marginalized foods may have real implications, potentially positive and negative, for the culinary and nutritional practices—and marginality—of the groups and cultures traditionally associated with those foods.

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### Notes

1. Food and movement also apply to culinary tourism (Long 2004). Culinary tourism may involve travel to other destinations (Pilcher 2004; Rudy 2004), the incorporation of diverse cuisines into home cooking without travel (Wilson 2004), or local travel

that is a conceptual return to an “idealized and re-created version of home” (Saltzman 2004:226).

2. Similar processes have been explored elsewhere. For example, Shortridge’s (2004) work demonstrates how small towns can reinvent themselves as ethnic destinations for tourists by commodifying ethnic identities and ideas of authentic foods, architecture, and festivals. For a detailed examination of the importance of place-based foods and a consideration of how specific characteristics, like environment and ethnic heritage, shape local foods, see Saltzman’s (n.d.) ongoing work on Iowa place-based foods, which examines the stories of specific foods, from rhubarb and dandelion wines to sorghum and blue cheese.

3. The standardization and mechanization of food practices can also occur when diverse food cultures are incorporated into a corporate food system. As Belasco (1987) has demonstrated, a rising interest in ethnic foods in the United States allowed food corporations looking to expand their markets to enter into the ethnic fast-food realm. This contributed to the creation of mass production techniques and standardized staple foods in fast-food restaurants.

4. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), food security refers to having physical and economic access to enough safe, nutritious food to meet physical needs and food preferences (1996). A basic definition for food sovereignty is “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (La Via Campesina 2007). La Via Campesina also places food sovereignty as a precondition to true food security. Patel (2009) has explored expanding definitions of food sovereignty.

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# *Loving People, Hating What They Eat*

## Marginal Foods and Social Boundaries

Richard Wilk

This is a conceptual essay that asks general questions about how likes and dislikes for cuisines are related to attitudes towards groups of people. Why do people sometimes want to eat the food of a despised other, for example, Chinese food among Anglo settlers in gold rush California? How do food boundaries relate to social boundaries? My goal is to put the whole issue of why some foods become “marginal” and others central, why some foods are loved and others despised, into a more general theory of taste and social boundaries.

There are many reasons why a food, spice, or ingredient might be considered marginal. It could be extremely common, cheap, and low in status, or rare and expensive, limited in seasonality or distribution, or highly perishable. As psychologists and nutritionists suggest, a marginal food might also be potentially (or seasonally) poisonous, lacking in nutrients, contaminated with microbes or chemicals, or so labor-intensive to obtain and prepare that the nutritional payoff does not justify the effort. Another form of marginality that is more familiar to ethnographers is the cultural definition of a food or ingredient as unclean or taboo, on the basis of either mythological connections or the magical effects of particular foods on the body. These kinds of marginal foods are peripheral to this paper, which focuses instead on food that is socially marginalized.

In every culture, foods acquire significance partially because of the way they relate to social groups and boundaries. But there is no direct relationship between marginal foods and marginal groups of people; in fact, the opposite may be true, where socially marginal groups have to constantly strive to fit in by conforming to the blandest of mainstream standards, for fear of even greater marginalization (Murcott 1996). In this paper I argue that in order to recognize the complex relationships between marginal people and marginal foods, we must understand how foods and groups are related to one another in a *system of taste*, a historically and culturally specific set of relationships between foods that defines their values relative to each other. Marginality is a relational concept, so a despised food is always marginal in relation to others, and it is these relationships, rather than qualities of the foods themselves, which I explore here.

## Tastes and Distastes

An older anthropology of food and taste concentrated on the close relationship between taste and entire cultures, or even types of cultures. For structural and cognitive anthropology in the tradition of Douglas, Leach, and Sahlins, tastes are social and categorical, forming neat oppositional pairs, and defining bounded categories of time and identity. As such, the classic “primitive” has no individual tastes at all, only categories of proper and improper, clean and dirty. So “primitive society” was constructed as one shaped by constraint rather than demand, and these constraints were categorical and typological rather than individual or interior processes of identity formation. This is reflected in literature on rural and peasant foods. Goody (1982) described a near-universal human diet based on one or two staple starches, eaten with a simple sauce made from some combination of vegetables and small amounts of meat, fish, or other protein.

More recent work challenges the “monotony thesis” that erases taste from premodern society. Weiss’s work on the Haya of Tanzania, for example, shows that they make very fine distinctions of taste and texture among home-brewed banana beers and other staples (Weiss 1996). The Q’eqchi’ Mayan farmers I worked with in southern Belize in 1979–80 got almost all of their calories from tortillas and corn dumplings, which I found indistinguishable (and often indigestible). But everyone in the village could identify an individual cook from the tortilla’s shape, texture, and flavor. They were connoisseurs of subtle distinctions that I had not learned to make. Even in a situation of seeming uniformity and monotony, and even where

food is scarce and people are close to starvation, people readily distinguish their preferred foods, pick their favorites, and judge quality.

A focus on preferences alone, however, can be very deceptive. People often attempt to map nations and ethnic groups with emblematic foods, like roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, or hamburgers and hot dogs. Spiering (2006), for example, discusses the English self-characterization as a “beef eating people” and their complementary “phagophobia” towards the overrefined cuisine of the French, and Markowitz (chapter 2) discusses urban Peruvian perceptions of alpaca meat as a “dirty, hazardous Indian food.” In practice, these emblems do not reflect real dietary practices or even preferences in any systematic way (Rooney 1982). Like other kinds of material culture, food styles do not always directly correspond to the ethnic, national, or social borders that appear on maps (see Hodder 1982).

Defining social boundaries by looking at preferred or symbolic foods is also subject to *selection bias*, where the choice of food determines the location of the boundary.<sup>1</sup> It is too easy to pick some dish, style, ingredient, or recipe that defines whatever social boundary we seek. So in a multiethnic country like Belize (where I have worked since 1973) it is possible to find dishes that are eaten by people who define themselves as East Indians, and other foods designated for Maya, Creole, Garifuna, and Mestizo. In fact, this is exactly what people do every year at events like Carnival and the national agricultural show, where each ethnic group presents an emblematic dish, along with their traditional dress, dance, and music, in the kind of pageant of diversity approved by an official government policy of tolerant multiculturalism. There is no question that from an emic point of view, these foods have symbolic weight and cultural importance. But objectively, ethnic boundaries do not always appear in the food practices of daily life, and one could choose ingredients or dishes that would produce different boundaries, or even national uniformity. The location of the boundary depends on which preferences are chosen.

Beyond the early literature on taboo and a psychological literature on disgust, there is very little systematic research on the social role of distastes. But in a world where preferences constantly multiply, one could argue that distastes should become more and more significant. Certainly the explosion of “picky eating” among North American and now Chinese children seems to suggest that distaste is an important way for people to assert their individuality and difference in consumer society (Counihan 1992; Jing 2000). In small, face-to-face communities, distastes can be much more subtle and expressive means of expressing affiliations, origins, and beliefs than preferences are (Brekke and Howarth 2000), and distastes can impose

very different kinds of social discipline than tastes. As a matter of social learning, distastes are also very important: playing a role in society requires learning what kinds of goods to dislike, what things are inappropriate in various settings and situations, and what are proper means of showing degrees of disgust with varying degrees of subtlety (Bourdieu 1984). Dislike is an essential part of our conscious and strategic relationship with goods in social life, and the flow of fashion, growth during the life course, and social change all require that we learn to dislike things that we once valued very highly.

There is also evidence that people learn tastes and distastes in different ways, and that distastes can be manipulated by advertisers and marketers. Historians have shown how disgust and distaste were carefully cultivated and nurtured tools in selling twentieth-century consumers a huge range of chemicals and cleaning tools, appliances, and products (Hoy 1996; Smith 2008). Vacuum cleaner manufacturers invented different kinds of dirt, and deodorant producers elaborated a complex taxonomy of bad smells (Williamson 1986:223).

In their 1993 book *Marketing to and through Kids*, Guber and Berry give practical instructions for selling products to what was then a \$150 billion children's market in North America (the figure rose to about \$300 billion by 2001 [VOA 2001]). At the very beginning of the book, the authors argue that what impels children is not so much the desire to have the right things, but the fear of having the *wrong* things, tastes that would make them outcasts. Critics of consumerism often see marketing as the process of instilling new desires, but this manual reveals that the secret of children's mass consumption is instead teaching children to reject often-familiar things they have already learned to like at home, to acquire a complex set of distastes. It logically follows that any theory of how foods are marginalized, taken off the menu so to speak, cannot be separated from a theory that accounts for valued tastes and popularity.

## **Inclusion and Exclusion**

It is an anthropological truism that social boundaries are produced through relations of inclusion and exclusion (see particularly the work of Frederik Barth and Irving Goffman). People can define themselves as members of a group because they share qualities such as language, dress, political beliefs, or skin color. In doing so they implicitly or explicitly contrast themselves with other people who do not share these qualities or who

have qualities or customs that are different (Royce 1982). The classic ethnographic literature on marginalized and “outcaste” groups like the Burakumin, Gypsies, and Untouchables tends to assume that the dimensions of difference that hold groups together on either side of a cultural boundary are closely related to the ones that keep them apart, and even that they are mirror images of one another. These complementarities are expressed through dichotomies like clean/unclean, high/low, and light/dark, but these differences are often portrayed as static and timeless, when in fact anthropologists have found that they require constant efforts at boundary maintenance and reinforcement.

The role of food in making social boundaries should lead us to think these assumptions through in more detail. Let me give an example. When I was growing up in southern Connecticut, I was an avid fisherman. In both rivers and estuaries I would occasionally catch eels. Initially put off by their size, sliminess, and resemblance to snakes, I asked in the local bait shop if they were edible. The white owner and customers cautioned me that eels were inedible, that they were dirty bottom feeders that ate garbage, and that only blacks ate them. I was advised to kill them and throw them back in the water because they were “trash fish.” I later confirmed that there were indeed people in a neighboring, predominantly African American community who considered eels delectable, and sought them out. This contrasted strongly with the attitudes toward lobster in the same two communities. At that time an exalted delicacy in the richer white community, lobsters were considered dirty and inedible by many African Americans (this attitude has changed since the 1960s). Eel and lobster therefore provide a contrasting pair of foods with which we can explore the relationships involved in creating and maintaining a social boundary.

In this case there are actually two very distinct forms of boundary making at work. One is inclusion based on shared distaste: “we (white people) do not eat eels.” The second is exclusion based on a shared taste: “they (black people) eat eels.” But this does not complete the matrix of possible combinations of taste/distaste and inclusion/exclusion, as I show in figure 1.1.<sup>2</sup> People can also define themselves as members of a group (inclusion) because they *share* tastes with others: “we (white people) love lobster.” And they can exclude others on the basis of not sharing a taste: “they (black people) do not eat lobster.”

The various symmetries of this matrix reveal that a taste or distaste is not enough in itself to create a social boundary. Furthermore, instead of two possible sets of relationships between likes and dislikes, there are actually four. Both likes and dislikes can act as forms of social inclusion or

	Inclusion	Exclusion
Love	“We love lobster.”	“You love eel.”
Hate	“We hate eel.”	“You hate lobster.”

Figure 1.1. A matrix defining possible combinations of ways that food likes and dislikes can be used to define social boundaries through either inclusion or exclusion.

exclusion. We might expect the sets in figure 1.1 to line up in diagonal pairs, such that one group likes something that another group hates, and vice versa, but there is no necessary reason why likes and dislikes should be linked in this way. It is equally possible for the two horizontal positions to exist independently, or for all four to operate at once. We could make the chart even more complex by introducing indifference as another option, as in “Lobster is our favorite food, but you don’t care about it or consider it special.” Rejecting the significance of another group’s special feast or festival foods, or indeed its unclean or forbidden ones, may be enough to instantiate a boundary. One can even imagine cases where indifference is more powerful than distaste, since distaste involves *recognition*, a kind of categorical equality. Indifference can actually signify a superiority so great that the “other” is not even recognized or allowed on the social “map.”

My key point here is, first, that we need to pay attention to the specific kinds of relationships that make some foods marginal, and to recognize that social boundaries can be created, challenged, and maintained through a variety of tastes, distastes, and other emotions. It is also worth noting how the public possibilities of taste and distaste are very asymmetrical. In anonymous, large social groups, likes are much more easily signaled than dislikes. It is easy to see what you do like to eat, because eating is a visible performance, but it is much harder to tell what you don’t like to eat—that takes a lot more time and observation. So tastes may have much stronger signaling possibilities in public social situations, while distastes and avoidances are much more effective in smaller and more intimate, face-to-face communities. Carnivory is visible to everyone who sees you coming out of the butcher shop, while buying vegetables alone does not identify you as a vegetarian. Social knowledge and expertise is always required to make useful sense out of other peoples’ tastes and distastes, but it is a more complex task to interpret distastes. This might help explain why consumption is not always very conspicuous, while avoidance and taboo may require strong assertions of faith, visible and prominent symbols of orthodoxy, and

repeated public statements of abstinence, in order to be visible and taken seriously. Identity through consumption does not require constant oversight or supervision, but distastes or aversions are ever-present and need vigilance, constant effort to avoid pollution.

## Classifying Food and People

One of Bourdieu's most important dicta in *Distinction* is that consumption is an act that simultaneously classifies objects while it "classifies the classifier" (1984:6). When people divide food up into groups, they also divide themselves into groups. So across social boundaries, we should expect to find different classifications of food, and different systems of names for food groups and ingredients. For example, poor rural people may classify snails and eels as subsistence foods, while rich urban people classify them as gourmet treats, and the middle class treats both as inedible and disgusting. This dynamic means that in a single society or social group at any moment there are popular and unpopular foods, but because of social competition and the instability of social boundaries, food taxonomies instantly change, and foods or dishes may switch positions in those taxonomies.

Food anthropologists often study the changing social positions of foods, and the ways classifying food as traditional, modern, national, or ethnic acts to mark class or ethnic groups (e.g., Billard 2006; Stanford, this volume; Utari, this volume). Typically, some group identifies itself as the keeper of real tradition, stereotypes others as inauthentic, and chooses a group of symbolic foods that represent their concept of the past. Alternatively, a group might classify some foods as healthy, hygienic, and modern, and depict themselves as partisans of a new and progressive social order. The boundaries between "traditionalists" and "modernizers" may stay the same even as foods change their polarity and meaning. As Pilcher (1998) documents, dietary modernists in Mexico championed wheat over indigenous maize for decades, but moved on to other issues when science conspicuously failed to support their claims.

Similarly, the above-mentioned case of eels in the United States is a striking example of how a food can go from being mainstream to marginalized in a relatively short period of time. From settlement right through the nineteenth century, eels were considered a great delicacy in the eastern United States, associated with sophisticated consumers, as they were in Europe. They were harvested in large quantities, and eaten widely in

urban and rural areas. Then, in a relatively short time between 1900 and World War I, for reasons that still remain obscure, they became “unwholesome” and even “inedible” and dropped off menus entirely (Schweid 2003). In all likelihood they were associated with European immigrants at a time of severe public backlash and hostility towards mass immigration. Eels were replaced with “safer” and more recognizably native fish and meats. They only returned to favor in the late twentieth century in the form of Japanese sushi, which ironically is usually made from eels caught in the United States then shipped to Japan for fattening and processing (Corson 2007)! The regularity and predictability of these processes of replacement of one food by another suggests that there is an underlying order to the way food classifications change in complex capitalist societies.

To try to identify some of these patterns, I set out in 1990 to replicate the survey that formed the basis for Bourdieu's book *Distinction* (1984) and is reproduced in an appendix to that book. My survey included 389 individuals from three different communities: 250 from Belize City, 81 from the small but cosmopolitan city of Belmopan, and 58 from a rural Creole village. There was a high degree of ethnic mix in Belize City and Belmopan, and 101 people identified their parents as speaking two different birth languages.

In the survey items I paid much more attention to foreign travel, close relatives living abroad, ethnic background, exposure to media, and gender than Bourdieu did in France. Also, Bourdieu asked only what people liked, and what their *favorite* items and practices were, in retrospect a peculiar choice for a book about social distinctions. I mostly followed his lead. My survey covered all kinds of tastes and preferences in music, interior decoration, clothing, music, television, films, and reading matter, usually by asking respondents to pick their favorites from a list.

While I was making up the survey and pretesting it in focus groups, though, I was struck by the dramatic uniformity of Belizean preferences. Most people, regardless of class and ethnicity, seemed to like pretty much the same foods, the same TV shows, and the same music. When I tried to discuss with people why they liked particular foods or shows or music, I found them very inarticulate (unusual for Belizeans!). “Well, I just like it.” “It just tastes good to me, that's all.” But when I got people talking about what they did not like, I often could not stop them. Strong distaste was evocative of personal events, family connections, politics, cultural differences, aging, and life philosophy—the full, rich range of ways that taste and preference are part of daily life.

As among North Americans, food dislikes were often associated with unusual textures and strong odor: “I don’t like that because it is so chewy”; or “That slimy feeling in your mouth afterwards,” were common answers to my questions about why particular foods were hated. This is an interesting contrast with preferred foods, for which texture and smell rarely surfaced as key qualities when informants explained their choices.

For this reason I added items about dislikes to the survey. Question 23 was a list of twenty-two kinds of music, with people asked to pick three favorites. The next question asked them to pick two that they “really don’t like and would not listen to.” Question 30 offered a list of twenty-one kinds of food, including Creole, Hispanic, English, and international dishes. Respondents rated each item on a four-value scale: “love,” “like,” “dislike,” and “hate.”

In general, the data from the main section of the survey (regarding the things that people liked) proved opaque and unenlightening. Unlike the France of Bourdieu’s depiction, Belize did not have a refined hierarchy of taste, where subgroups could be easily distinguished on the basis of their preferences for particular kinds of music, food, dress, and décor (Wilk 1994). The average person loved 6.1 foods on my list (range 0–19) while hating 4.3 (range 0–14). Very few of the preference items in the survey showed statistically significant correlations with any of my measures of education, wealth, exposure to media, amount of foreign travel, age, gender, or ethnicity. My “Loving” food index correlated significantly (1-tailed at  $< .01$  significance) with only one variable: education level. More highly educated people tended to love fewer foods, a sad commentary on the value of education perhaps, but a realistic measure of its success in imparting cultural capital.

Distastes in music and food, on the other hand, were easy to connect to a number of social traits. My index of food hatred correlated significantly with eight out of ten social variables. Urban people tended to hate more things, as did those whose parents were both Creole. People who were richer, had higher household incomes, were better educated and worked in higher-status occupations all tended to have fewer specific hated foods. This may be a direct product of the colonial history of Belize, which achieved independence only nine years before the survey was conducted. As citizens of a newly emerging state, educated and well-traveled Belizeans may have found it important to be cosmopolitan, open to a wide variety of tastes, while expressing fewer strong preferences or antipathies towards the mixture of local and foreign items on my survey.

This accords with work in the United States which showed that more highly educated people are more tolerant and have fewer dislikes, at least when it comes to music styles (Bryson 1996:895). Little other systematic

work has been done on the social distribution of dislikes (but see Warde 2011).

Regardless of their significance independently, the data on likes and dislikes, when combined, provided a means of dividing the twenty-one different foods into groups, based on the combinations of likes and dislikes shown for each. I simply tabulated the number of people choosing each of the four scores for each of the foods on the list, and sorted them according to the profile of responses. Ignoring for the moment those that did not evoke strong feelings one way or the other, the rest of the foods fall into four categories, as mapped in figure 1.2.

1. Those that many people love and many people hate (e.g., cowfoot soup)
2. Those few people love, but many people hate (e.g., tuna sandwich)
3. Those many people love and few people hate (e.g., rice and beans)
4. Those few people love and few people hate (e.g., hamburger)

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) and later works, Bourdieu provides a model for thinking about how cultural taxonomies and structures like kinship are used and practiced in daily life. His analytical categories can be readily adapted to make sense out of each of the positions defined in figure 1.2. According to his terminology, cell 4 on the lower right is the space of *doxa*, or the habitus, the taken-for-granted, habitual practices that people hardly notice. A food occupying this position is so much a part of

		Love	
		+	-
Hate	+	1 cowfoot soup (Bourdieu's heterodoxy)	2 tuna sandwich
	-	3 rice and beans (Bourdieu's orthodoxy)	4 hamburger (Bourdieu's doxa)

Figure 1.2. A matrix defined by preference scores given to different foods on a survey conducted in Belize in 1990. Foods were ranked according to the total number of people in the sample who rated a food as “loved” or “hated.”

daily life that it has little significance. It is the kind of food you might serve at an informal event not related to food at all, where you just want to make sure you serve food that everyone will eat.

In a society like Belize, where few people are vegetarians, grilled meat generally fits this category neatly, and the hamburger has been a common casual food for at least fifty years. And of course, since Belizeans watch a great deal of cable television taken from satellite feeds complete with commercials, they see thousands of advertisements for hamburgers every week. Cell 4 on the chart corresponds well to what Miller and Woodward (2007) call “the ordinary,” or the “blindingly obvious” everyday articles of consumption like denim pants which are so common we barely see them any more. They are unremarkable and ubiquitous, and on one level quite uniform, while at the same time being infinitely adaptable and customizable, so they allow each person both to fit into a public group and to feel like an individual.

Cell 1 on the upper left corresponds to Bourdieu’s category of *heterodoxy*, a zone where strongly opposed positions are contested in public. These positions are more than just different interpretations of the same ideologies or rules; they are contested values that people think of as opposed or mutually incompatible. In heterodox situations, people are forced to choose sides. Bourdieu depicts doxa as a relatively stable position, where cultural values are experienced as entirely natural and unquestioned, in contrast to the inherent instability of heterodoxy. It is also possible to think of situations where heterodoxy can be stable. When contrasting values are held by different classes or ethnic groups within a nation-state—when they represent alternative political, moral, or religious ideologies—heterodoxy could persist for a long time, mirroring the stability of the boundaries between categories of people.

Foods can certainly be closely linked to heterodox positions, as is cow-foot soup in my Belize survey. This dish is a soup made from cow’s foot, tripe, okra, and cocoyam; it has the thick texture of many New World stews that have deep African roots (Twitty 2006). In 1990 it aroused strong passions in Belize because for some people it evoked “roots” food, grounded in Afro-Caribbean traditions, Creole ethnic identity, rural traditions of self-sufficiency, and pride of place. For others it marked poverty, unsophisticated taste, dirty and cheap ingredients, and narrow or parochial values. Twenty years after the initial survey, the polarities of tradition and modernity have realigned in a number of ways, allowing Creole traditions new forms of legitimacy, so cowfoot soup is no longer such a volatile dish, and it has probably moved out of cell 1 into cell 3. New kinds of foods have

become heterodox in the meantime, and this turnover suggests that foods may cycle through positions on this matrix in regular ways.

Cell 3 is occupied by rice and beans, the self-consciously national dish, which probably had its origins as a Sunday-dinner counterpoint to slave rations of flour and salted meat (Wilk 2007).<sup>3</sup> This position best accords with what Bourdieu calls *orthodoxy*, where discursive power is exercised to suppress alternatives. Doxa does not require any reminder, threat, or pressure to conform, because its dictates have been thoroughly naturalized as bodily experience (what Bourdieu calls *hexis*). Orthodoxy, on the other hand, requires a constant reminder, and indeed rice and beans has emerged only recently as a public symbol of Belize, the single dish that appears on every menu. Every tourist guidebook alerts tourists to the ubiquity of rice and beans, and there are regular cook-offs and contests to see who makes the “best” version. Every public event or banquet that has any pretense to being cultural, in the sense of relating to local rather than global cosmopolitan values, must include at least a token scoop of rice and beans on the plate. This dish is like a flag, which must constantly be kept visible as a reminder that some values are more important than others (indeed it is called the “coat of arms” in Jamaica).

This suggests that cell 3 is where we should expect to find “emblematic” foods that stand for place, strong common identity, and group solidarity. It is tempting to think that over time and through constant use, the symbolic power of the orthodox might wear out, and objects or substances with this meaning will gradually fall into the taken-for-granted, habitual space of the hamburger. In Belize, at least, this has been a very slow process, since rice and beans became the orthodox national dish some time in the middle of the twentieth century and shows no sign of losing its place in the present. If anything, with the growth of tourism and the need for something “local” to sell to visitors, rice and beans is now more firmly identified with Belizean national identity than ever before. This fact is somewhat ironic given that variations of the very same dish are found throughout Latin America, in most places in the Caribbean, and in many parts of North and South America as well.

Cell 2 is the most curious and interesting place on the chart because it does not correspond to any of Bourdieu’s categories in his theory of practice. Nobody picked a tuna sandwich as a favorite food, many people were neutral, and even more reacted with strong distaste. In 1990 a tuna fish sandwich was an uncomfortable food for most Belizeans, closely identified with the United States, expatriates, and the cosmopolitan urban upper middle class. That is not to say that people never ate it—canned

tuna and mayonnaise were available in almost every shop. But it was seen as a kind of polite white food, a dish richer parents might serve children as an after-school snack or as part of a light lunch served at a formal church, charitable, or political event. It manages to be both foreign and expensive without having high status, so it brings little benefit at a high cost.

Foreign foods often enter Belize in this position. A good example is the fast-fried chicken that Chinese immigrants introduced into Belize in the early to mid-1990s. While Chinese restaurants have been popular in all Belizean towns for well more than a century, at that time a new wave of immigrants from Hong Kong and southeastern China opened small takeout stands in almost every neighborhood, rich and poor, offering small portions of fried chicken and potatoes at prices that made them an economical alternative to other street foods or even full meals cooked at home. “Dolla fry chicken,” as it was called, was a new kind of fast convenience food, and it quickly became a staple, but it was also extremely controversial. Public health officials blamed the Chinese for rising rates of high blood pressure and diabetes. Newspaper articles accused the Chinese of debasing traditional cuisine and driving Belizean restaurants out of business. Callers on radio programs claimed that rats, cats, and other animals were being served in place of chicken, or that the Chinese were engaged in a stealthy extermination of the Creole population by giving them diabetes and high blood pressure.

Chinese food as a whole was not being questioned or blamed. Instead a single dish became the focus of intense dislike. A lot of people were eating the Chinese quick-fried chicken (which was not actually very different from any other fried chicken), but few publicly admitted actually liking it. Like a tuna sandwich, quick-fried chicken was a convenience food that was closely associated with a minority; interestingly enough in both cases this minority was widely perceived to be unjustly privileged.

This situation accords with theories of fashion that locate sources of innovation among marginal and foreign groups that are engaged in a search for legitimacy (Frank and Weiland 1997; Simmel 1902). In many cases, the innovation fails and never has the chance even to become unpopular. It is also possible for a new item to enter the system of taste in cell 2 then disappear because it never becomes an established part of the local diet for ecological, economic, or other practical reasons. But given time, it is also possible that the item may fall into the insignificant position of doxa in cell 4. This has probably been the history of hamburgers, which were an unusual and anomalous food in the early twentieth century, and were still recognized as a North American import in the colony of British Honduras

when I first visited in 1973. As they increased in popularity, again as a convenience food, they gradually lost their Americanness and became part of daily life. Pizza has followed a similar course, with the added novelty of being the first food in Belize that has ever been expressly delivered, though there is a long tradition of door-to-door vending of freshly cooked local breads, tamales, fruit, and snacks.

Neither burgers nor pizza ever became controversial and heterodox, perhaps because they were so closely associated with being higher class, better traveled, and more educated. Chinese fried chicken, on the other hand, quickly moved over to the left. Despite some predicting it would cause the death and destruction of Belizean culture, it continued to grow in popularity, and I suspect that if I ran a survey today I would find many people who rated Chinese takeout chicken as something they loved.

Sushi followed something of the same trajectory in the United States, entering as a strange and alien food that contradicted every cultural category of edibility (Mintz 1996). The American fascination with sushi is complex, and has never been clearly explained by scholars, although the popular press has linked it to the American sense of growing Japanese economic and political stature in the 1980s. But once it became a fashionable food, it took no more than twenty years to move gradually downscale, into cafeterias and supermarkets, gradually being adapted and adopted by Americans into a favorite food found in almost every supermarket. Eventually, it may become so much a part of North American foodways that it will lose its Japanese associations entirely and become a completely naturalized part of daily food habitus. This constitutes a counterclockwise path through figure 2, starting in cell 2, moving through 1 and 3, and finally ending up in 4.

## Conclusions and Marginal Comments

Food is a complex system of signification, loosely connected to sets of social relations. Therefore, we should not always expect a close congruence between marginal foods and marginal people. In fact, marginal cultures have been continuously mined for fashion innovations and popular trends for hundreds if not thousands of years. Enjoying a plate of jerk chicken in a Caribbean restaurant does not mean you actually want to know anything about Jamaican culture or walk by a Jamaican on the street in your neighborhood. It can be a performance of sophistication, a mere fashion accessory.

The global arena is something like a beauty pageant, where ethnic and national cuisines compete for legitimacy and prestige, each taking their moment in the public eye (Möhring 2008). The parade of national dishes and styles all have similar structures—emblematic ingredients, celebrity chefs, star restaurants, critics, journalists, historians, and experts who create what I have called a “structure of common difference,” an arena defining the grounds and stakes for competition (Wilk 1995). From this global perspective the truly marginal people are those who have no voice, no cuisine, nothing that can be appropriated or marketed. They may be the people whom we know nothing about; for example, the hundreds of millions of people in African nations and cultures whose rich, complex cuisines are compressed into a few emblematic Ethiopian dishes, Wolof rice and peanut soup. In making choices about cuisines in the international arena, each group has its own “significant others,” which tend to overshadow the unknown thousands of “insignificant others.” It is not hard to see why modern types of mass-produced fast food, having originated in the United States, would arouse so much passion around the world, at a time when that country seeks to extend its economic and political power to new levels.

Similarly, in this paper I have not really asked why some foods in Belize remain so marginal that people do not care about them one way or another. Why should so many of the subsistence foods of rural people gradually fall out of use, with younger generations failing to learn even their names (Zarger 2003)? On the other side of the planet, in Laos, the same kind of rural “starvation food” is suddenly elevated to the status of “yuppie chow,” a gourmet treat with magical medicinal qualities, entering the export trade at a huge price premium (Van Esterik 2006). Are we really “saving” these foods when we wrench them out of their social and ecological context, and shine the light of glamor on them in gourmet magazines? Answering these questions will require excursions into media studies, global and international trade and regulation regimes, and a detailed understanding of development politics and practice in each specific locale. Perhaps *invisible foods* might be a better label than *marginal foods*, a way of identifying ingredients and dishes that are actively being erased, eliminated, silenced, or suppressed.

Marginality can be defined relationally within a single food system, through foods' connections with classes, ethnic groups, religious groups, and regions. I argue that we have to pay closer attention to how this process of association works, thinking about boundaries as more dynamic and as being created through both inclusion and exclusion using positive and

negative associations. Marginality of this kind is positional, not inherent in the food's ingredients, qualities, costs, or origins.

A relational approach gives dynamism to what could otherwise be a very static analysis of how a group's foodways are rooted in timeless tradition. Instead, there is a constant interaction between the significance of foods and the social boundaries they both reflect and help constitute. Marginal groups may indeed be the sources of foods that become "mainstream," but that does not mean that the group's position changes. Food may sometimes have that kind of transformative power—there are, for example, signs that hostility towards Chinese immigrants has dropped significantly in Belize, now that their food traditions have become more widely accepted (and as Chinese immigrant farmers have started to introduce new fruits and vegetables in local markets). But more often, I suspect, foodways have relatively little power to actually change ethnic or other social boundaries in significant ways. Did the acceptance of Japanese food onto the American ethnic menu reduce general anxiety about resurgent Japanese economic and cultural power? I think it more likely that the collapse of Japan's economic miracle into stagflation and the rise of China had much more substantial effects than learning to relish wasabi and pickled ginger. Food may have more symbolic power in smaller, less mass-mediated multiethnic societies like Belize.

Instead of transforming social categories or boundaries, more often foods have a tendency to move through different social contexts and positions, changing their meaning and valence in subtle ways as they go. I have used several conceptual devices to try to show how this movement can follow regular patterns and pathways, though my analysis is suggestive and partial rather than definitive. My survey instrument was really not designed for this purpose, and since the survey was only done once, it cannot really tell us very much about dynamic processes. It would be much more interesting to repeat the survey at intervals, to see how different kinds of foods move and change meanings over time.

Another question about marginal foods that I have not addressed here at all is why some foods and dishes disappear and lose all significance. The processes of social memory have tended to attract more attention than the complementary project of understanding loss and forgetting, especially in the realm of food, since the cherishing and revitalizing of traditions is so visible, public, and easy to study. However, the loss of foods and their disappearance from everyday life would be a very worthy anthropological project, likely to tell us a great deal about class and ethnic politics in turbulent times, as well as the politics of marginality.

## Notes

1. Selection bias was one of the issues raised often in the early twentieth-century anthropological debates over migration and diffusion. With the right selection, you can prove that any two cultures share a common ancestor. To some extent the same problem continues to bedevil attempts to use DNA analysis to trace ancestral connections.

2. An earlier version of this table was published in Wilk 1997.

3. Various authors have argued that the combination of rice and beans was an African invention carried to the New World by West Africans from rice-growing regions (Carney 2001; Twitty 2006). As far as I can tell, neither rice nor beans was grown in any quantity by slaves in Belize, who concentrated on root crops and plantains in their “provision grounds” (see Murray 2006).

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## *Highland Haute Cuisine*

### The Transformation of Alpaca Meat

Lisa Markowitz

“The real reason to visit Peru is the food,” proclaimed the *Guardian* in April 2008 (Doran 2008). Over the past several years, Lima, dubbed the gastronomic capital of South America by the *Toronto Star* (Ferguson 2007), has become, according to the *Washington Post*, a new “destination for foodies” (Khalip 2007). Certain regional dishes have long had their fans; witness, for example, Calvin Trillin’s intrepid search for the tastiest ceviche (Trillin 2003). The current boom, however, is something more, as chic restaurants in the capital draw acclaim and customers for elegant reworkings of classics and for introducing and integrating ingredients and preparation styles from the country’s multiple agro-ecological zones, immigrant populations, and regional foodways (Álvarez 2007).

While food writers and chefs celebrate the pleasures and possibilities of maritime delicacies and Amazonian fruits, and students flock to culinary institutes to learn new preparation styles, my interest here is with a central component of the offerings, the promotion of foods from the Andean Highlands. Although Sierran migrants to Lima have long consumed Andean tubers and grains, innovative versions of these foods have now reached high-end palates as the new fusion cuisine highlights the rediscovery and gastronomic reprisal of the “Lost Crops of the Incas” (NRC 1989). The food boom is not restricted to Lima. What has been termed Novoandina cuisine appears in the old Andes as well, where, often touted as traditional and ecological fare, it is found in the southern tourist belt

that extends from Cusco (gateway city to Machu Picchu) to Lake Titicaca on the Bolivian border.

In the Highlands, more so than in Lima, one item that appears frequently on menus is alpaca meat. This makes sense. Peru has by far the world's largest population of alpacas, about three million according to the last official census in 1994. More recent estimates suggest a much larger population, as high as five million (Torres 2008; Wheeler 2008). So it would seem unproblematic that alpacas would share with guinea pigs the status of a must-try tourist treat. And, as I argue in this essay, they should. Nonetheless, the ascent of alpaca kebabs and steaks to high-end menus counters a long-term exclusion of the meat from the national mainstream, or white-mestizo, diet. In this chapter, my aim is to trace and explain the still-incomplete cultural transformation of alpaca from its status as "dirty Indian food" to healthy and desirable fare.

Given alarms over rising levels of world meat consumption with its deleterious environmental consequences (Delgado et al. 1999; FAO 2006), it may seem curious to advocate the inclusion of yet another species in the "good to eat" bestiary. However, in contrast to the industrial formulae which attend much of the world's livestock production, alpaca husbandry has the potential to help conserve the grasslands of the high Andes while continuing to provide a livelihood for the people who live there. This chapter begins, therefore, with a description of alpaca-raising in southern Peru. This sketch of production regimes and economic practice draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a herding community (Province of Caylloma) in 1988–89. Subsequent shorter visits and interviews with people involved in the alpaca sector (1994, 1996–2000), as well as related research in Bolivia (1992–94), largely inform the account of alpaca development programs.<sup>1</sup> Although I had followed efforts to promote alpaca meat through the 1990s and noted its appearance on tourist menus by the middle of the decade, it was my experience visiting Peru in 2006, as an appreciative participant-observer in the culinary wave of *Novoandina*, that renewed my interest in this topic. Further, as the chapters in this volume demonstrate, the emergence of once disdained or neglected subaltern foods and foodways as objects of gastronomic desire is a widespread trend. More broadly, this pattern is an example of the ways dietary preferences and practices intersect with, reflect, and reify wider historic and cultural processes. In this case, the story of the historic rejection of alpaca and the course of its expanding acceptance shed light on the country's distinctions of class and ethnicity, the tactics and discourses of rural development projects, and the continual interplay of the local and the global in the social construction of good food.

## Alpaca Production

For more than four thousand years (Aldenderfer 2001), the exploitation of New World camelids, a genus that includes llamas (*Lama glama*) and alpacas (*Lama pacos*), as well as the feral vicuña and guanaco, has constituted an essential component of subsistence strategies practiced in the Andean Highlands. In fact, during the pre-Hispanic era the distribution of camelids in the Andes was far greater than it is today (Flores Ochoa 1977). In indigenous highland, and to some degree coastal, societies, the animals furnished critical resources. For example, the use of llama caravans facilitated integration in the geographically dispersed but powerful Tiwanaku state (AD 500–1000) in the south central Andes (Lynch 1983). Llamas similarly furnished portage for the Inca Empire (1438–1532), as well as meat and ritual items, and their fleece, along with that of the alpaca, provided the raw material for a vibrant weaving tradition (Murra 1980).<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the Andean Highlands, the raising of camelids, goats, sheep, and cattle complements other forms of agricultural production and economic activities. Agropastoralists often mix cropping and herding strategies to take advantage of landholdings in different resource zones, which typically lie at different elevations. At altitudes above 4,000 meters, however, climatic conditions limit agriculture. The high elevations also restrict the options for raising livestock because introduced species, such as cows, horses, and some breeds of sheep, often suffer from low fertility and a range of other health problems in the cold, hypoxic setting. In contrast, alpacas and llamas, as indigenous domesticates, are well adapted to altitude and natural pastures.

Today, camelid husbandry constitutes the primary livelihood for tens of thousands of rural families in the high Andes of southern Peru and Bolivia. In Peru, alpacas are largely raised by smallholding ranchers in areas that are among the country's poorest. Nearly 80 percent of the country's alpacas are found in the departments of Puno, Cusco, and Arequipa (Torres 2008). This region—part of the *sur andino*, or southern Sierra, with its large Quechua- and Aymara-speaking rural populations—is accorded a pronounced social identity as indigenous.<sup>3</sup> Most contemporary production is in the hands of some 120,000 smallholding families (Torres 2008:9) who tend alpacas, often along with llamas, sheep, and more rarely cattle on the high altiplano and cordillera. The means by which these *alpaquero* families secure access to pasture and labor differs between and among herding communities, but in general, alpaca husbandry is a family undertaking, based in a peasant labor process (Trouillot 1988).

Although substantial social and ecological variability exists within the southern Peruvian Sierra, herding practices in the district where I lived in 1988 (Callalli, Caylloma), in the high cordillera of the department of Arequipa, are not at all atypical. Most families tend herds composed of alpacas, llamas, sheep and, to a lesser extent, cows on ridgetops and in valleys at elevations between 3,900 and 4,800 meters above sea level. Mixing herd composition allows herders to utilize variable rangeland and to deploy limited labor more fluidly. Herders often have use of two or more sets of pastures, and move their livestock from one to the other depending on seasonal availability of forage. Their access to the critical means of production—animals, labor, and land—comes through inheritance, kinship, and several different land-use arrangements. And, counter to long-standing urban conceptions of peasant livelihood, alpaqueros here and elsewhere in Peru raise little food for their own subsistence. Rather, they derive most of their on-farm income through sales of animal products and purchase nearly all their consumption goods through the marketplace.

Alpacas are famous for their wool, or fiber as it is known in the textile industry, and sale of the animal's fine fleece provides a central source of household income. Typically, alpaqueros have transacted with rural wool dealers, who in turn sell to a smaller number of relatively well-financed intermediaries, who market directly to firms in the southern city of Arequipa. Since the late 1960s the export and industrial processing of wool, or fiber, have been dominated by a very few commercial concerns based there, which together control the market. This monopsonistic control, coupled with the vagaries of both the international fashion industry (the major end users) and the high-mountain climate, subjects producers to considerable economic uncertainty. In addition to low and variable income streams, alpaqueros confront the lack of infrastructure and poor access to social services that characterize the rural Sierra. In this context, an increased demand for alpaca meat could both enhance a secondary source of household cash and simultaneously provide incentives for producers to implement the animal management strategies necessary to optimize fiber production. I will return to the producers presently, but first will visit the consumers, to explain why alpaca has been unwelcome at so many Peruvian tables.

## **Disparaged Meat**

Among Peru's urban population, alpaca meat suffers from a reputation as dirty, hazardous Indian food. I should mention here that in Bolivia,

members of the La Paz middle class hold similar views of llama meat (Sammells 1998; Sammells and Markowitz 1995).<sup>4</sup> But why?

In his synthesis of the archaeological and ethnohistorical literature on camelids, Bonavia (2008) contends that at the time of Spanish invasion (1532), the consumption of llama and alpaca meat was widespread. According to Aldenderfer, most archaeologists concur that the “primary context of animal domestication was for meat” (2001:21). It is important to keep in mind that in the Americas very few animals were domesticated, and no other of these species could come close to furnishing as much dietary protein per carcass. The sixteenth-century chroniclers cited by Bonavia note the importance of the camelids as a source of meat and generally praise its flavor. Garcilaso de la Vega, in particular, is effusive in describing llama and alpaca: “Their meat is the best in the world; it is tender, tasty, and wholesome. The meat of the 4- or 5-month lamb is recommended by doctors for invalids in preference to chicken” (Bonavia 2008:411).

The historical reasons for alpaca meat’s fall from gustatory grace are unclear. Disease legends of obscure and confusing origin surround the meat. The association of camelids with disease appears to date back to the veterinary epidemics of the colonial period, when contact with European animals decimated alpaca and llama herds. Peruvians worry that eating alpaca meat may cause syphilis or leprosy (Casaverde 1988:34; Primov 1983:2–3), rephrasing the story that syphilis originated with llamas in the New World and was contracted by the Spanish who then carried it back to Europe. The Spanish authorities may have disseminated this story to discourage their colonial subjects from slaughtering and consuming the llamas necessary for portage in the Andean mining economy (Lieven, cited in Machicado Oliver 1993). Another group accused of rumor-mongering are nineteenth-century mohair traders, who perpetuated disease stories to thwart competition from their new rival in the textile industry, alpaca fiber.

A more readily explicable anxiety is that camelid meat may be infected with trichinosis or other hazards usually associated with pigs (Cáceres Cabana 1998; Sammells 1998; Sammells and Markowitz 1995). This fear probably stems from the presence in camelids of a parasitic infection called sarcocystosis, colloquially known as *triquina*, which is common among poorly managed stock and older animals.<sup>5</sup> The infection is detectable by the presence of small whitish granules that speckle the animal’s muscle tissue. Consumption of infected meat, if it is raw or inadequately cooked, can lead to temporary gastrointestinal distress (Leguía 1991); more serious consequences are rare (Sammells 1998).

These concerns are likely entangled with and reinforced by the more generalized disdain for camelid meat that arises from its association with Indians, who for white-mestizo Peruvians are often the too-closely related other. As Weismantel (1988:9) points out, “The relations of domination established in the colonial period were represented by the stigmatizing of certain indigenous foods as ‘Indian,’ and hence unfit for consumption by non-Indians. This practice of denigration . . . is still very much a part of Andean life.” The visible and physical separation of livestock production perhaps intensifies this pattern of stigmatization. Images of beribboned camelids padding along mountain trails, after all, are emblematic of the indigenous Andean world. Alpacas graze at high altitudes, on the *puna*, which in contrast to the settled agricultural valleys is a wild, transient, and foreign place (Ossio 1988). In the Andes, discourses of racial and class difference have often invoked notions of decency, which involves moral and personal hygiene (de la Cadena 2000). Benjamin Orlove (1998) has suggested that Indians’ proximity to the earth is read as backwardness, with potential for contamination. Not only might the animals carry contagion, but the very bodies of their human caretakers are also suspect. Fears of contagion have provided the basis for erecting social and legal boundaries to limit the interaction between Indians and white-mestizos. In the central Andes, as Wilson (2004) explains, by the late nineteenth century, concerns over epidemic diseases along with a fragmentary understanding of bacteriology served as justification for civic authorities to control and monitor the movements and bodily practices of local Indians. Zulawski (2000:116), examining public health campaigns in early twentieth-century Bolivia, notes that “elite anxieties about contamination can be understood as metaphors for fear of loss of control of society’s lower orders.”

One way, of course, to maintain distance from the unsavory other—the indigenous, the rural, the poor—is via dietary practices. In highland homes, alpaca meat is consumed fresh, usually in soups and stews, or jerked, as *ch’arki*. Luis Montoya (1988) found, in a series of interviews with middle-class residents of the southern Peruvian city of Arequipa, that consuming alpaca counters their notions of social identity. Being Arequipan means eating certain dishes and being white. In contradistinction, alpaca is Sierran Indian food. In Peru, those who can afford to purchase beef or mutton—the middle class—avoid alpaca because it is a food of the poor (Cros 1987:10). These deprecatory images of alpaca meat turn out to be self-fulfilling: since alpaca lacks urban recognition as real food for real people, its retail has been poorly regulated—the meat is not always inspected, vending stalls are dirty, and so forth—thus providing visual confirmation for claims of dirt and contamination.

## Transforming Alpaca

Efforts to overcome and reverse this reputation of alpaca have been in place for more than two decades and have shifted in orientation and tactics. Development agency and NGO reports from the mid-1980s (e.g., Bravo-Baumann 1985; Cros 1987; Primov 1983) emphasize alpaca meat commercialization as a complement to fiber production. Livestock extension agents saw overstocking as a threat to high-elevation pastures, and urged producers to adopt management strategies that emphasized quality over quantity of animals. One way to achieve this is by culling herds. However, low prices for alpaca meat—at the time about 50 to 60 percent those for mutton, the next cheapest red meat—provided no incentive for alpaqueros to eliminate inferior animals. Their calculations were sound. Given the metrics of fiber and meat production, slaughtering poorer-quality alpacas did not make sense. In Caylloma, alpacas were shorn five to eight times over as many years, with most animals being kept for at least six years. At best, an alpaquero could sell an eighteen-month-old animal (technically, the optimal age for slaughter) to meat dealers for about \$13, whereas, at worst, over the next five years, the same herder could earn slightly more by selling its wool, and at the end of this time still have the hide and meat for personal use. In a better and more typical case, the alpaquero could earn two to three times as much for the animal's wool over its lifetime.<sup>6</sup> The tendency for producers to hang on to animals well (three to five years) past their commercial meat prime also contributed to the meat's poor reputation. Higher prices for alpaca meat had potential to alter the commercialization calculation and thus management practices, lessening stress on range resources, but first required the creation of a formal alpaca meat market. And, in order for this to happen, the meat's virtue had to be made known.

The ensuing promotional campaigns spearheaded by the NGO supporters of alpaquero regional organizations deployed science to untether alpaca from its indigenous earthy roots and raise it to the status of a healthy alternative for the nutritionally savvy modern consumer. Alpaca's nutritional qualities—higher in protein and lower in fat than other meats—formed the core of the advertising mantra. Although this knowledge did not spread as widely or rapidly as NGO staffers had hoped, it was frequently imparted to me by alpaqueros, who sought to assure me of their meat's superior qualities. In the mid-1990s, under the auspices of DESCO (a large Peruvian NGO) a butcher shop featuring fresh and processed alpaca meat was opened in an upscale neighborhood in Arequipa. One of

the promotional brochures for this shop, which depicts decidedly non-indigenous Peruvians enjoying meals in charming settings, was, like the store's name, Casa de Pierre, conceived to address and alleviate middle-class anxieties. The verbiage in the brochure also confronts people's apprehensions. It first gives a little history of alpacas and then moves to meat: "The alpaca is considered a fine human companion; alpacas exported (abroad) are raised in the mansions of the rich and famous and are treated like kings." (This is actually not far from the truth for some alpacas in the United States.) It continues,

Among city dwellers exist myths, invented by the Spanish to denigrate alpaca and to introduce their own products to the New World. Research shows that ideas such as that alpaca carries disease or that it smells bad are false. These beliefs have persisted for a long time, to such an extent that in some places, it is thought that alpaca is not suitable for human consumption, and the dealers who hauled it to cities had their goods confiscated and were beaten by state authorities. So, alpaca meat was never given the same treatment as other meats; the animals were not slaughtered in official facilities, with appropriate sanitary standards; it was sold in market stands, not thought worthy to share space with other meats in a *decente* butcher shop. ("de los Andes" n.d.; my translation)

The word *decente* is bolded in the original Spanish text, an allusion to decency, to appropriate social hygiene. Here, then, is a plea for consumers to disregard their prejudices, to recall their admiration for alpacas as part of the national patrimony, and to purchase this healthy food in an establishment appropriate to people of means and discernment.

In the 1990s, later efforts to promote alpaca also built on that decade's pervasive neoliberal ideologies to recast alpaqueros as rural entrepreneurs who could avail themselves of market demand through the use of modern technologies (see Bolton n.d.). DESCO, with support of the Spanish development agency AECL, aimed to "stimulate the meat sector by improving hygienic conditions and increasing supply volumes" (Fairfield 2006:44). To this end, DESCO imported equipment from Spain and established a state-of-the-art meat-processing facility in the town of Chivay, provincial capital of Caylloma. The plant was created to operate as a sanitary slaughterhouse where meat could be inspected and certified. Meat too infected with sarcocystosis to be sold as fresh cuts could be transformed into sausages, mortadella, and other cold cuts. Rendering the meat into cold cuts was intended to simplify preservation and transportation. Although

the plant's presence improved the offerings in Chivay's burgeoning tourist sector—alpaca dishes appeared in virtually all the town's restaurants—and for NGO staff who frequented a small alpaca-burger joint, there was not sufficient demand for it to operate without heavy Spanish subsidies. Nonetheless, the quest for buyers opened new, if modest, markets in hospitals, chain supermarkets, and the tourist industry. More recently, parallel processing and promotion efforts have emerged. In Puno, for example, a small plant opened that specialized in sausages, hot dogs, and smoked meat; and in Chivay, a butcher (who worked with Spanish developers) is creating high-end cold cuts.

In 2004, the state agency charged with overseeing the camelid sector commissioned a market survey in Lima, finding that prejudice against alpaca meat persists among the middle class—the majority of housewives did not tell family members they were being served alpaca—and that the greatest potential for sales existed among upper-income consumers interested in the meat's health benefits (Fairfield 2006:44), findings which correspond to results from an earlier series of interviews with women in the city of Arequipa (Cáceres Cabana 1998). More recent reports seem to confirm alpaca's newfound relative popularity among upscale consumers. In the summer of 2008 my research assistant, Emily Rigdon, searched for alpaca meat in Lima. She found the largest supply and greatest variety of cuts in a supermarket catering to the upper middle class; in another middle-class market, she spoke with vendors who claimed that they sourced their animals directly from the Highlands, and that the vast majority of their customers were students enrolled in Lima's culinary institutes. I should add that something of a parallel trend seems underway in La Paz: John Brett (2008) noted that llama "is widely on offer in higher end restaurants . . . [and the dishes] tend to be among the most pricey on the menu." This class-based pattern of consumption corresponds to the "style sandwich" Richard Wilk (2006) describes in his study of Belizean foodways. "At the bottom were poor people eating 'ground foods' and game by necessity, and on top you had rich people who could eat the same things out of nostalgia or for their exotic appeal. In the middle, poverty food was a constant reminder of how precarious class position could be, and how easy it would be to fall back into poverty" (123). Like the Belizean upper classes, well-to-do Peruvian urbanites are sufficiently removed from alpaca's rural, indigenous provenance to enjoy it, whereas members of the middle class tend to retain suspicions of those associations. Similarly tourists, to whom the meat has been explicitly marketed, do not share Peruvian prejudices toward the Indian but rather are excited to sample tastes of the

exotic, indigenous world. As noted, this newfound acceptance is far from universal, but it is important because its economic implications auger favorably for alpaqueros.

### **Prospects for Alpaca Meat in the Agrarian Economy: Discussion and Conclusions**

It is important to point out that the expansion of Peru's gastronomic scene occurs in the context of unprecedented national economic growth. Over the past decade, rising exports, especially of minerals, have made the Peruvian economy the fastest growing in Latin America. However, the country's high growth in gross domestic product (an average of 7.3 percent between 2003 and 2008) has not been matched by a corresponding drop in inequality; in other words, this newly generated wealth has not been equitably transferred across households (Gambetta 2009:15). More concretely, the benefits of this extraction-based growth have not reached the majority of poor Peruvians living in rural areas. Although national poverty levels diminished between 2004 and 2008, living conditions in the Highlands and Amazonian region remain far below those along the coast (Munilla 2010:9–10).

The situation of Andean peasant farmers has been especially difficult. Over the past twenty years, segments of the Peruvian agricultural economy have faltered and conditions for many small producers have deteriorated. Although the southern departments have long been among the country's poorest, small farmers there fared badly under Peru's neoliberal regime. With the structural adjustment policies implemented by President Fujimori in the early 1990s, the state abandoned directed programs of agricultural development and extension, while trade liberalization fostered a rise in cheap food imports (Crabtree 2003). Restructuring has made smallholders' livelihoods even more precarious by precipitating a fall in commodity prices, the need to (further) intensify household labor to make ends meet, and an increase in food insecurity (Plaza and Stromquist 2006). As analysts have pointed out, small farmers "are barely making a living" (110).

Studies suggest that the growing demand for Andean foods in high-end restaurants may benefit small-scale producers (Devaux et al. 2009; Dobkin 2008). The growth in Peruvian culinary tourism (among both nationals and foreigners) is poised to extend this demand beyond Lima, especially to the well-trod tourist circuit through the country's southern Andean departments: Cusco, Puno, and Arequipa, where the great majority of alpacas are

raised. Although culinary-tourism supply chains, especially in poor countries, are largely uncharted (Smith and Xiao 2008) and are the subject of only recent, if enthusiastic, investigation in Peru, their emergence in the southern sierra would appear to present opportunities for alpaqueros.

Whereas highland agriculturalists to some extent have the option of “retreating” into subsistence production to satisfy family needs (Crabtree 2003) alpaqueros, in contrast, produce directly for export (fiber) and for the domestic market (meat). And, even though some export-oriented agricultural producers seem to have been favored by trade liberalization (Crabtree 2003), the easing of export restrictions apparently has not enabled alpaqueros to capture a relatively higher return for their fiber. Members of the camelid veterinary technocracy have argued that improving alpaqueros’ livelihoods ultimately rests upon improving the quality of camelid fiber, and numerous extension programs, largely funded by international donors, have sporadically carried out animal breeding and management initiatives toward this end. Given the paucity of resources directed toward alpaca development, improving the national alpaca herd is a long-term goal. In the nearer term, however, the Andean food boom and concomitant expansion of highland meat markets may benefit alpaqueros. Culinary tourism plays two roles in respect to improving the prospects for alpaca meat. Obviously, it creates demand, but perhaps more importantly, as NGO staff would explain, the association with tourists, who to poor urban Peruvians appear to be wealthy, lends the meat an elite stamp of approval. If rich white people eat this meat, how can it be Indian food?

In an assessment of the role of livestock in mitigating poverty in highland communities, Kristjanson and colleagues (2006) found that the intensification of production and marketing has helped southern Peruvian (Puno Department) ranching households improve their economic status. Although the prejudice against alpaca meat has meant that it usually is commercialized through informal or poorly regulated markets, certain strategies seem viable. For example, Markeleva and colleagues (2009) note that smallholders offering perishable, high-value products (in contrast to staple foods) have had the most success entering new markets when they are organized as producer groups. Alpaqueros in the south have a long (if variably effective) history of collectively bulking fiber to obviate intermediaries. Collectively selling meat is more complicated since individual households pursue different marketing strategies and frequently rely on meat sales to cover punctual family expenses. Further, the quality requirements of restaurants and high-end shops necessitate more sustained technical support in respect to transport, storage, and presentation. However,

one of the benefits of participation in producers' organizations is access to such support, generally proffered by NGOs. Sufficiently high prices may provide the incentive for alpaqueros to work with and reinvigorate existing producers' organizations to take advantage of new markets (and perhaps to strengthen their bargaining power in existing ones).

Greater consumer acceptance of and desire for alpaca meat is likely to advance short- and long-range goals for improving the livelihoods of alpaca raisers. More consistent demand and the likelihood of higher prices alter the range-stocking calculus that producers have employed. First, culling herds can further demand by bolstering the reputation of alpaca meat among hesitant consumers, who may have memories of biting into a tough piece of aging camelid. The early elimination of inferior animals from herds both lessens pressure on forage resources and may contribute to a genetic upgrade of livestock (or at least put an additional brake on the deterioration), and thus to the long-term goal of improving fiber quality. Promotion of alpaca meat, via strengthened market channels and renewed technical support to producers, benefits herders while increasing the availability of nutritious animal protein to domestic consumers. In the ideal scenario, alpaca steaks and burgers will find their way from tourist redoubts and upscale bistros to the *menu popular* and kitchen table.

Alpaca's rise to respectability in Peru is replete with irony in that the current repackaging of the meat both counters and celebrates its prior vilification. Its legacy as a source of disease and contamination has been replaced with its status as a healthy alternative to fatty red meats. Its identification with "backward Indians" now renders it an object of gastronomic desire, as an authentic food of the Incas. In this curious but by no means unusual twist of twenty-first-century foodways, the new, the *novo*, makes the old respectable, and perhaps, delicious.

## Notes

1. Grants from the Wenner-Gren Foundation (1987, 1999) and the University of Louisville (1997, 1998, 2000, and 2006) supported this research.

2. These are the conventional dates; see D'Altroy and Schreiber (2004:261–64) for discussion of the chronology.

3. Because this social mapping is ubiquitous with respect to the external perception of *alpaquero* communities and livelihoods (notably as found in guidebooks and other tourism literature), and is common in historical accounts, I employ it, and the attendant convenience of the categories Indian and white-mestizo. Ethnic and racial terms of reference in the Andes and within Peru are, however, far more complicated and situationally constructed than these terms suggest. For a particularly sensitive

discussion of social and ethnic identities in the province of Caylloma (discussed below), see Femenias 2005.

4. To most consumers, the meat of alpacas and llamas is virtually indistinguishable. The larger llama, with its higher carcass weight, provides more meat; its greater size, along with the low value of its fiber (compared to alpaca), suggests that the animal's production should be *primarily* geared toward meat (Antonini et al. 2006; Salva et al. 2009). In Bolivia, where llamas far outnumber alpacas, llama is the camelid meat subject to stigmatization.

5. In her study of llama meat in La Paz, Sammells (1998) traces the etymologies of meat and parasite associations.

6. The difference in fiber income depends largely on color. Reflecting the preferences of the textile industry, fiber bulkers pay more for white wool than for gray, brown, or black wool. At the time of my research, buyers paid twice as much for white wool than colored. As a result, alpaqueros have selected for white animals; at the time about 70 percent of the alpacas in Caylloma were white. This “whitening” of the herds is regarded as a threat to the species' genetic diversity.

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# *Redefining the Cultural Meanings of Sinonggi during the Indonesian Decentralization Era*

Wini P. Utari

This chapter discusses the intersecting processes of change in governmental politics and food culture via a consideration of the consumption of *sinonggi* (sago palm flour paste) in Indonesia. Since the late 1990s, the Indonesian political and administrative paradigm has shifted towards decentralization and regional autonomy. The new policies assign greater power, responsibilities, and autonomy to people at the district administrative level and below. As dependency on the central government in Jakarta has theoretically weakened, people in other districts have taken the opportunity both to restructure their administrative systems and to rebuild their regional and ethnic identities. The right of locals to manage their own regions was followed by heightened regionalism in many other aspects of life, including ethnic identity and pride in ethnic food such as *sinonggi* among the Tolaki of Indonesia.

## **The Cultural Meanings of Food and Eating**

Food is an aspect of culture. What we put into our bodies, and how we prepare and consume it, can tell us and others about our beliefs, perceptions, and ways of thinking. Food has been used creatively as a symbol and expression of identity politics. For example, in *Food and Everyday Life on*

*Kentucky Family Farms*, Van Willigen and Van Willigen (2006) cite the role of foods as cultural icons, in that people use iconic foods, such as fried chicken and country ham among Kentuckians, to represent their culture and state. As symbols, food and the practice of eating carry different meanings. Mintz (1996) theorizes that those meanings can be simplified into inside and outside meanings. The inside meaning is constructed by the conditions of daily domestic life and work. The outside meaning is constructed by larger social, political, economic, and environmental forces and conditions. Since daily domestic life is connected to those larger forces, inside and outside meanings are also connected.

My observation of the Tolaki food culture took place during my fieldwork in the Tomeka District<sup>1</sup> in Southeast Sulawesi Province from the end of 2002 to the beginning of 2004. My research studied the impacts of decentralization in administrative systems on agricultural extension programs. In the process, I came to recognize a connection between decentralization and the process of redefining regional and ethnic identity through food. Heightened regionalism and increased ethnic pride have led to a redefinition of the cultural place of ethnic food. People have begun to project a more positive attitude toward ethnic foods such as *sinonggi*, which had been overshadowed by rice.

In this chapter I discuss the cultural meanings and status of *sinonggi* in relationship to rice, and the practices of a people reasserting their identity through food, eating habits, and eating performance. I also analyze the connections between food culture and politics as the process of decentralization and regional autonomy has created a space for *sinonggi* and *mosonggi* (the practice of eating *sinonggi*) as markers of Tolaki ethnic pride. In exploring the cultural meanings of *sinonggi*, I use Mintz's concepts of inside and outside meanings. I also look at the concept of space, public and private, where the practices of eating as a habit or as a performance can serve to inform one's identity. Eidheim (1959) uses the phrase *sphere of interaction* to refer to this concept of space. Finally, I demonstrate the exercise of power through the creation or redefinition of cultural meanings of food, the functions of food as a powerful symbol of culture and sense of being, and the interconnection between the outside and inside meanings of food and food practice (Mintz 1996).

## **Sinonggi and Tolaki Food Culture**

The Tolaki are an Indonesian ethnic group that originated in Southeast Sulawesi Province and are the dominant native culture in the Tomeka

District. Like many other districts in Indonesia, Tomeka is a culturally diverse region inhabited by a mix of people who are considered either *orang asli* (native) or *orang datang* (migrants).

One of the identifying features of Tolaki culture is sinonggi, an ethnic staple food made from sago flour, which is harvested from the trunk of sago palms (*Metroxylon sagu*). *M. sagu* reproduces either by suckers (most commonly) or by seed (rarely). The trees can be found in lowland freshwater swamps or in traditional swidden gardens up to 2,300 feet above sea level in areas receiving 80–200 inches of annual rainfall (McClatchey, Manner, and Elevitch 2006). In the Tomeka District sago palms are still abundant in the wild and may be semi-cultivated in people's gardens (see figure 3.1).<sup>2</sup>

Within the first few days of my stay in the village of Indapoli in the subdistrict of Umomi, the oldest subdistrict in Tomeka, my friend and field assistant took me to a sago factory to show me how the plant was processed. We stopped in the middle of a rice paddy. I was initially confused because I did not see anything that looked like a factory to me. I was expecting a big structure with some machines in it. I followed my field assistant, who guided me through a swampy part of the rice field surrounded by many palm trees. As we were approaching our destination, I began to hear the



Figure 3.1. Sago palms planted in a garden. (Photograph by Wini P. Utari)

sound of motors. Out in the open air in a part of the swamp littered with fallen sago trees, I saw two men crushing and grinding sago trunks (see figures 3.2 and 3.3). I asked my friend, “Is this the factory?” He said, “Yes, this is the sago factory.”

Sago flour can be manufactured entirely by hand using traditional hand tools or using a mechanized grinder, as the workers were doing in this case (see figure 3.2). The procedure for processing sago flour is as follows: *mowuwu*, poking the trunks and checking whether they have sufficient



Figure 3.2. Mechanized grinding (*mengolah sagu*) in an outdoor “sago factory.” (Photograph by Wini P. Utari)



Figure 3.3. Mixing ground sago with water in the outdoor “sago factory.” (Photograph by Wini P. Utari)

starch to be harvested; *mondusa*, building a simple structure that will be used for separating the edible portion of the trunk from the debris; *mondue*, cutting down the selected trees; and *mowota*, cutting the trunks into pieces. At this point, the trunk sections are ground, either manually or by machine; manual grinding with traditional hand tools is referred to as *sumaku* or *menokoh sagu*, mechanized grinding as *mengolah sagu*. The ground sago is shoveled into a coarse fabric and stomped while being mixed with water, to sift out the fine flour (a step called *lumanda*; figure 3.3). The

end product is a wet, white, thick paste that is collected (*sumandu*) and stored in either a traditional container called a *basung* or in a small jute or plastic rice sack (Tarimana 1993).

Most sago flour in the region is harvested and processed in locally owned sago factories. Sago production in these factories is seasonal and small scale, typically being initiated in response to consumer demand and operating when laborers are available. When locally produced sago flour is unavailable, the best substitute is tapioca.

Sago or *sinonggi* agriculture lends flexibility to the Tolaki's livelihood. One of my research participants told me that in the past when traditional Tolaki families had one or two *basung* of sago flour in the house, they felt secure for the short term because they did not have to work or leave home to find food daily. A few days of doing *sumaku* could provide sufficient food for the whole family for several months. Eating sago would give them a unique feeling of fullness that symbolically marks a time to rest and live a relaxed, ideal life.

During my fieldwork, people in Umomi often told me that not having to work daily is the preferred traditional Tolaki livelihood, as represented in a myth involving a snake. The snake is active and busily wanders around looking for food only when it is hungry. Once it finds food, it eats until satiated, then coils up and rests quietly until it is hungry again. The relaxed nature of the snake in the myth represents the perceived Tolaki natural character and an idyllic lifestyle in which they have flexibility and time to relax. Sago culture supports such a lifestyle because many sago trees are still available in the wild and those that are cultivated do not demand intensive care. In contrast, some Tolaki feel constrained when they plant wetland rice because the crop is labor-intensive. Growing wetland rice, a practice imported by Bugisi, Torajanese, Balinese, and Javanese migrants, requires daily monitoring. Tolaki commonly grumble, "Growing wetland rice is similar to taking care of babies."

## Eating Sinonggi

I ate my first *sinonggi* during my stay in the Umomi Subdistrict. My initial impression was that the dish was plain and modest, since my family comes from a region of Indonesia that has a much spicier cuisine. In appearance, cooked *sinonggi* resembles a bowl of white glue. It is prepared by mixing the ivory sago flour with boiling water in a large, deep bowl until the mixture becomes smooth and translucent, with a thick, pasty consistency.

Traditionally, it is served in individual, shallow bowls. Because sinonggi is sticky, some type of liquid or simple broth is poured into the bowls before the sinonggi is added, to prevent it from adhering to the bottom. Portions of sinonggi are transferred to the individual bowls by spinning a ball the size of a fist with a pair of wooden sticks similar to oversized chopsticks. It can then be cut into bite-sized pieces using a pair of smaller wooden or bamboo sticks (called *o songgi*) or one's fingers. Cooked meat or vegetables may also be added to the dish. Traditionally, people shove the sinonggi chunks into their mouths with their fingers and slurp the soup from the bowl. The sinonggi pieces should not be chewed, but rather, swallowed whole, which is not easy for those who are not accustomed to the practice. The protocol or rules of traditional mosonggi are however not rigid. One can eat with a spoon at a slower pace and sit at a dining table instead of on the floor with one leg folded.

In general sinonggi has a subtly sour smell and taste. The added broth, cooked vegetables, or meat is what imparts flavor to the dish. Because sinonggi is always consumed with a hot soup-like liquid, one tends to sweat and experience a brief sensation of being intensely full after eating it. The Tolaki consider this experience unique to mosonggi and distinct from the experience of eating rice. The pronounced feeling of fullness after mosonggi can be attributed to the rapid consumption of the dish and the fact that sago flour expands when mixed with liquid in the stomach. This intense feeling is short-lived, but the Tolaki prefer it so because their bodies do not feel heavy and sluggish, yet they do not soon feel hungry again. In contrast, their perception of eating rice is that the fullness tends to linger and can make their bodies feel heavy. Those who prefer the lingering fullness from eating rice will often say, "A meal is not really a meal unless it includes rice."

Many Tolaki families eat sinonggi at least once a day. It has to be prepared fresh and served immediately. Though the process is simple, it is typically only practical to prepare and serve sinonggi for the whole family at once when they are gathered for the meal. Thus, mosonggi serves as a pleasurable social event that brings the family together. On the other hand, the fact that sinonggi must be made to order means it is less practical to prepare than rice. Women, who do most of the sinonggi preparation, often need to plan their other activities around mealtimes, limiting their ability to leave their homes unless they can find someone else to prepare sinonggi for their family.

The importance of fresh sinonggi became clear to me during my stay with a host family during my fieldwork. This Tolaki couple used to live in

the city. The husband was a retired navy officer and the woman a housewife. Their children were all grown and lived or worked in other cities. When she left town to visit her grandchildren for a few weeks, the wife would ask her divorced sister to stay in the house to prepare and serve her husband's meals. If the sister had chores to do elsewhere, she had to adapt her schedule around her brother-in-law's lunchtime, so that she could cook and serve *sinonggi* for him. Sometimes she had to wait hours for him to return home, and she would go out only after having served lunch. On one occasion, however, I did see my host father preparing his own *sinonggi* when his wife and sister-in-law were both away from home.

### Sinonggi, Rice, and Identity

In Indonesia rice is a staple as well as a politicized food.<sup>3</sup> As a staple food, it is the main daily source of carbohydrates for the majority of Indonesians, typically being consumed two or three times a day. This daily dietary dependence on rice lends it political significance. The continual availability and affordability of rice is an important measure of Indonesia's national stability and security. The government of Indonesia gives priority to rice production and distribution even if it must be heavily subsidized or imported. Former President Suharto set a national goal to reach a rice production target that would fulfill national demands and avoid the necessity of importing rice. The government achieved that target for the first time in the mid-1980s, and the accomplishment was celebrated as an indicator of national food security and of Indonesia's independence from rice-exporting countries.

Rice, therefore, can be understood as a marker of Indonesian national identity, and individual identity as an Indonesian is often associated with the adoption and consumption of rice as a staple food. This marker of identity was more likely to be expressed and to have power in the past when the nation was working towards building its national unity, stability, and identity after independence in 1945. The ideal of a single national identity, however, conflicted with the reality of Indonesian diversity. Though the slogan *berbeda-beda tapi tetap satu* (unity in diversity) was carefully crafted for building national unity without suppressing and marginalizing ethnic diversity, Indonesia's centralized administrative and political systems did not consistently follow through on this commitment. As a centralized national culture, largely based on Javanese traditions, gained increasing importance during the thirty-two years of Suharto's presidency,

the Javanese practice of growing and consuming rice spread out extensively beyond the core areas of Jakarta and Java to the peripheral islands of Indonesia and to ethnic groups that had not formerly eaten rice. The expansion of rice agriculture coincided with Indonesian national relocation programs,<sup>4</sup> which involved both subsidized and voluntary transmigrations, or *transmigrasi*, from densely populated islands such as Java to less-populated ones such as Sulawesi. Thus, the widespread consumption of rice as the staple food eventually became associated with the notion of being Indonesian. As Appadurai outlines for India in his classic 1988 article, “How to Make a National Cuisine,” Indonesians similarly used food to create a national identity.

The creation of a national identity through adopting rice as a staple led to an internalized expectation that Indonesians who consumed cassava, sago, corn, and other foods would adopt rice instead, which led to the marginalization of non-rice staple foods such as sinonggi. This situation further widened the gap in the social hierarchy between the dominant and the minority cultures, the center and the periphery, and rice over other staples. The lowering in status of non-rice staple foods contributed to the internalization of being inferior or backward, a feeling that is often associated with being rural, or *orang kampung*.

Among Tolaki families, rice has become an important staple food that rivals sinonggi. However, many Tolaki have conflicted feelings about both foods. Rice may symbolize their attachment to their national identity as Indonesians, while sinonggi may be either a symbol of the preservation of their Tolaki identity or a symbol of inferiority due to their psychological or socioeconomic inability to consume rice as a staple food. I often observed such ambivalent feelings among Tolaki during mealtimes.

During my time in Tomeka, people sometimes invited me to join them for lunch or dinner. Most of the time they served me rice, especially on my first visits to their houses. The same was true when I first arrived at my host family’s house in Santana, a remote village in the uplands of the Tomeka District. The region is commonly considered to be *daerah aslinya budaya dan orang Tolaki* (the area of the “real Tolaki people and culture”). I went there with a friend, an important government official in the subdistrict. We arrived in the evening. After a short conversation with the village headman, we were served a dinner of white rice, fried chicken (which was specially slaughtered for us and fried in homemade coconut oil), and vegetables. We dined with the village head in a modest dining space next to the kitchen. Since we were in a village known for preserving Tolaki cultural practices, I had expected we would be served sinonggi.

Because I was a female guest, I also expected the headman's wife would join us. Throughout the dinner, I wondered why neither happened.

I came to realize that this meal reflected the ambivalent status of *sinonggi* in some households: some Tolaki families might proudly invite their non-Tolaki guests to *mosonggi* with them, whereas other families were hesitant and even felt embarrassed to serve *sinonggi*, because they believed their guests might dislike it or denigrate it as inferior to rice. Such families would instead serve rice to their first-time non-Tolaki visitors. The unfounded inferiority associated with consuming *sinonggi* encompasses two misperceptions. First, as the national staple, rice is perceived as more prestigious than non-rice staples, including sago, cassava, and corn. In rural Javanese villages, rice is most widely available and consumed after the harvest, a period when resources are abundant, whereas non-rice staples such as cassava are usually consumed during leaner periods such as drought, pre-harvest time, or periods of economic crisis. Thus, rice is symbolically associated with prosperity or abundance, and other foods are considered inferior to it. A similar pattern is found in other Indonesian rice-producing regions, including some parts of Southeast Sulawesi. This province even uses the image of rice as one of its provincial symbols of prosperity.

Second, the inferior status of *sinonggi* is also related to the manner in which it is eaten. The culture of *mosonggi*—gobbling food, eating with one's fingers, slurping the soup from the bowl, and sitting on the ground—is counter to mainstream table manners. Tolaki families who were conscious of the inferior status of *sinonggi* and *mosonggi* were likely to serve their guests rice and keep their *mosonggi* party private.

During my stay at the Santana village headman's house, I was consistently served rice for lunch and dinner. When I returned to the house at midday, I often found my (rice-based) lunch set out for me on the table. However, I began to realize that the table was set for only one person, me. I began to ask my hosts if they had eaten lunch. They typically responded that they had either already eaten or would eat later, and politely instructed me to enjoy my lunch by myself. I followed their instructions until one day when I stayed in the house the whole morning. As lunchtime neared, my host mother started setting the table for my lunch. I asked, "What about the others?" She said that they would *mosonggi* later. I asked if I could join them and told her that I had tried *sinonggi* once when I stayed with my host parents in the other village. Though she was not sure I would enjoy *sinonggi*, she let me *mosonggi* for lunch with her. It was my first real *mosonggi* experience. I learned to swallow my *sinonggi* pieces without chewing and to fold one of my legs while eating. It was a happy lunchtime.

Everyone sweated and felt full after eating. I also noticed that my host mother seemed more relaxed and open during the meal. To enjoy a real mosonggi, one had to let loose. Formality and rigid table manners reduced the fun of it. That first mosonggi in the village headman's house helped break the formality between me and my host parents. When my host father returned home later in the afternoon, my host mother told him about our mosonggi party, and he smiled. From then on, I was welcome to join them for mosonggi. This experience changed our relationship and allowed for a deeper and more nuanced fieldwork experience.

### Redefining Sinonggi through Decentralization

Food has political meanings (see, for example, Appadurai 1988; Leitch 2003), and in the case of sinonggi, national practices of decentralization become important. Decentralization refers to a governmental approach to public management that gives the administration at lower levels opportunities to exercise their power in planning, implementing, and evaluating governing activities. Decentralization involves different processes of change in administration, funding, or politics (Manor 1999).

Since the late 1990s, the Republic of Indonesia—a country that had previously centralized its power and resources in the capital city of Jakarta and the island of Java—has gone through major political and administrative changes. Centralization, Jakartanization, and Javanization increased inequality between the center and the periphery of Indonesia and was followed by demands for regional autonomy in administrative systems, popularly known by Indonesians as *otoda* or *otonomi daerah*, which heightened the ideas of regionalism (*kedaerahan*) and indigenism (*keaslian*). The resentment toward centralization and its culture peaked during the end of Suharto's presidency. After thirty-two years of centralized government, the Habibie administration agreed to implement the concept of a decentralized administration. With the support of several donor agencies, including the World Bank, decentralization programs and pilot projects started in many districts, including Tomeka. These new policies assigned greater power and responsibilities to people at the district administrative level and below. As the power to control and manage moved away from the central government in Jakarta, at least theoretically, people at the district level had to restructure their administrative systems to improve their capacity for self-management as well as to rebuild their regional and ethnic identities.

The concepts of decentralization and regional autonomy later developed into the idea of *putra daerah*, or “son of the soil,” which asserted locals’ rights to lead and manage their own regions. The heightened regionalism during the otoda era intensified demands for sons of the soil to be elected or appointed as leaders in their own communities and regions. These demands also pressured leaders of migrant ethnic groups to be “more native,” or more *asli*. During the otoda era, being a *putra daerah* (son of the soil) or *orang asli* (a native) brought some advantages or privileges, such as access to higher social or political status and more opportunity to become political or social leaders. This political environment opened a field for redefining and renegotiating regional and ethnic cultural practices and identities, including re-emphasizing the cultural meanings of *sinonggi* and *mosonggi*.

Like being or becoming an Indonesian, being or becoming a “native” also comes with certain cultural expectations, such as adopting and practicing the imagined local native culture. Decentralization created opportunities to rethink the place of *sinonggi*, as illustrated in the story of Wanto, a young native Tolaki political activist who rejected rice as an expression of his attachment to his native culture. Wanto accompanied me early in my fieldwork, and he told me that he needed to eat *sinonggi* every day. He said he did not understand why his stomach did not feel well if he ate only rice. Though he couched his message in terms of his body’s inability to digest or accept rice, his tone reflected an ethnic pride in being Tolaki rather than a physical weakness. He was fully aware that his ethnic identity was an asset in his political activism during an era when natives could voice demands for a political leader or candidate from their own ethnic group or community. Though what constitutes being native or indigenous to a group such as the Tolaki can be a matter of question, at least among government officials involved in designing and planning the provincial decentralization program, Tolaki such as Wanto were quite clear about their attachment to their ethnic identities and had their own ways of identifying outsiders. Long (2004:24) suggests that the idea of otherness is constructed not only by culture, but also by its individual members. Abrahams and Bauman (1981:5) argue, “When you know your group as an insider, you will also have a clear sense of who the outsiders are.” Wanto knew that he could use his attachment to *sinonggi* to mark his native identity and to separate himself from those who were not Tolaki. Wanto’s expression and reaction in this situation is a good example of Mintz and DuBois’s (2002) assertion that food can function as a concrete marker of concepts such as ethnicity. By asserting that rice did not adequately fulfill his biological

needs (including his need to feel full), Wanto embodied his Tolaki indigenoussness; this physical rejection intersected with his symbolic rejection of rice, demonstrating how ethnicity can be “born of acknowledged difference and [work] through contrast” (Mintz and DuBois 2002:109).

As with being or becoming an Indonesian citizen, being or becoming a “native” comes with certain cultural expectations about adopting and practicing the native culture. The former association between sinonggi and cultural inferiority and backwardness is being redefined during the era of decentralization and regional autonomy. Consuming sinonggi is no longer a reflection of one’s inability to be an Indonesian. Rather, sinonggi has become a symbol of the Tolaki’s more intimate attachment to their ethnic identity and pride.

### **Mosonggi and the Politics of a Cultural Performance**

Mintz (1996:48) has argued, “Eating is not merely a biological activity, but a vibrantly cultural activity as well.” As a cultural activity, the practice of eating conveys different meanings that are often used as a cultural performance that functions to deliver certain messages for particular purposes, such as gaining sympathy and support. Some community leaders and political candidates in Tomeka District, both natives and migrants, were aware of those functions. They rode the momentum of heightened regionalism and decentralization and used mosonggi as a cultural performance to reflect their attachment to Tolaki culture and to gain support from the people. The purpose of the performance was to deliver a message about their “nativeness” and attachment to the ethnic culture and its people. Thus, eating sinonggi could make a putra daerah become more “native” and could advance migrants in their process of becoming “native.”

During my stay in the remote village of Santana, a group of government officials came for a long-awaited visit. The visit to this subdistrict was politically significant due to the location’s remoteness and challenges, as well as its claimed indigenoussness. The fact that leaders would visit the area projected their effort to understand the region and its people. During the visit, these high-ranking officials were scheduled to have lunch at one of the village headman’s properties, the nicest brick house in the area. The preparation started early in the morning. Many women came to the house to cook rice and various vegetable dishes, and make some sweet and savory snacks. A cow was slaughtered to make different meat dishes, including soup. As lunchtime approached, everything was set out on the floor as dictated by

custom. When the guests finally arrived and were served lunch, one of the most important officials, who was not Tolaki, requested *sinonggi* instead of rice. I was in the kitchen with the women when the village headman's daughter hurried in and informed the women of his request. Though there was brief chaos and panic in the kitchen, the women hurriedly prepared *sinonggi* and happily accommodated their guest's unexpected request.

This situation perfectly reflects the ambiguous perceptions of *sinonggi* even among the Tolaki. The initial decision to serve their respected guests rice instead of *sinonggi* came from the belief that their non-Tolaki guests would prefer rice and that it was the better food. Their lack of confidence in serving their own ethnic food and their desire to please their non-Tolaki guests shaped their decisions about what dishes to prepare. When they were invited to present themselves for who they were through serving *sinonggi*, however, the lack of confidence in their cultural practice was quickly transformed into cultural pride.

The meanings of *sinonggi* may be redefined and the practice of *mosonggi* even used as a cultural performance in public venues to assert one's ethnic identity or attachment to an ethnic group. Given the recent trends among Indonesian urbanites who enjoy exploring ethnic and new cuisines, both imported and local, and reenacting the traditional practices of preparing, serving, and eating those ethnic cuisines, the traditional practice of *mosonggi* can be easily adopted as an exciting cultural experience, even by those who do not have any attachment to the Tolaki culture or any political agenda. However, adopting *sinonggi* as the staple of one's diet, and *mosonggi* as an eating habit at home, can be a challenge for every family, particularly due to the need to serve and eat the food immediately and to people's internalized image of the food and the eating practice as inferior. Such differences between public and private consumption are not unusual and have been explored in other cultural contexts (see Wilk 2006, for example).

While the concept of private and public is spatial, it is also contextual. Eating a traditional dish in the traditional manner in public spaces, such as at fine restaurants or street cafes, or at home on special occasions, can be considered a public performance. As a performance or a drama, it is a pretense, not an expression of the performer's identity. Thus, regardless of *sinonggi*'s inferior status compared to rice, the person who is associated with it in a cultural drama does not become (or become perceived as) inferior. When a political leader from a rice-eating, non-Tolaki ethnic group requests *sinonggi* over rice for lunch during his official visit to Santana village, he is also enacting a cultural performance to build an image of his identity and solidarity with a native culture.

In a different context, when the ostensibly inferior eating practice is enacted in a private space, such as daily family mealtimes in a dining room or kitchen at home, the perception of inferiority can be internalized into the person's identity. Abrahams (1984:20) points out the connection among food, eating practices, and identity: "Ethnic or regional identity can be acted out within the home by eating certain foods prepared in the special ways." Thus, when people perceive their food and eating practices at home as inferior, they can also project their ethnic identity as inferior. Because of the intimate connection between food and identity, the perception of the inferiority of *sinonggi* and *mosonggi* can also be internalized into the Tolaki's perceptions of their ethnic identity. This explains why many Tolaki families I observed hesitated to invite their guests to *mosonggi* and preferred to keep their *mosonggi* party private until they felt secure that their guests would not look down upon them and their daily eating habits. Due to the social stigma or inferiority attached to their cultural identity and practices, the Tolaki made decisions about whether to share and present *sinonggi* and *mosonggi* to non-Tolaki, much as the Norwegian Lapps in Eidheim's (1959) study picked and chose where, when, and with whom to speak Lappish in their interethnic relations. I was able to join many of my Tolaki friends, including my host mother in Santana, for *mosonggi* after they asked me a question to reassure themselves: "Betul, iWini mau *mosonggi*?" (Are you sure, Wini, you want to *mosonggi* with us?). Before this realization, I simply followed my host family's suggestion: "Biar iWini makan dulu, nanti kita menyusul belakangan" (Why doesn't Wini eat first, we will eat later) and I ate most of my meals alone.

### **Revitalizing Mosonggi**

The change in Indonesia's political environment during the era of decentralization and *otoda* affected both the inside and outside meanings of *sinonggi* and *mosonggi*. Heightened regionalism associated with both political processes provided opportunities for each region to redefine the cultural meanings of its ethnic identity and to celebrate ethnic diversity in different regions of the nation. Those situations also created a space for Tolaki to redefine and assign more positive meanings to their ethnic staple food and eating habits.

The cultural meanings of *sinonggi* and *mosonggi* are contextual and relational. The social and political status of *sinonggi* may be perceived as subordinate to rice, the national staple food. The traditional practice

of mosonggi may not conform to the general rules of polite table manners. For Tolaki women, preparing sinonggi may constrain them from being away from home around mealtimes. However, I also have to note that Tolaki expressed a sense of inferiority towards sinonggi and mosonggi in situations where they were not sure of outsiders' acceptance of their ethnic food and eating practice. When Tolaki individuals were with new acquaintances, the habits of consuming sinonggi and sharing the traditional practice of mosonggi often elicited ambivalent feelings about their position relative to members of other cultures. Regardless of those feelings of inferiority, sinonggi is the Tolaki's ethnic food and mosonggi is the time when families gather and when the traditional role of a female as the family cook is acknowledged. Mosonggi is always an exciting and fulfilling social time that allows the participants to bond more intimately through food. Thus, the marginalization of sinonggi and mosonggi never reached a point where it significantly endangered the sinonggi culture or was detrimental to the Tolaki as a group because they still celebrated the joy of it as an ethnic food and as a social practice, at least within their safe environments and relationships. As a result, the positive tone of the inside meanings of sinonggi and mosonggi were still somewhat preserved.

The change in Indonesia's political environment during the decentralization and *otoda* era significantly affected the outside meanings of sinonggi and mosonggi. The space created to assert one's ethnic identity and present one's ethnic character conditioned outsiders' acceptance of minority and marginalized cultures, including the consumption of sinonggi and the practice of mosonggi. This political situation helped reclaim positive outside meanings of sinonggi and mosonggi, which then helped deepen the positive tone of their inside meanings. In a context of the weakening of Indonesia's centralized culture, there was more space to share ethnic character and promote ethnic pride in being Tolaki via sinonggi and mosonggi. As the cultural meanings of sinonggi and mosonggi are redefined, sinonggi may be readopted as a primary regional staple food, especially if the Tolaki can fully internalize sinonggi and mosonggi as a valued food and eating practice. However, for sinonggi to be adopted as the primary staple in the area, adjustments in sago production and availability would be necessary. Currently, in the Tomeka District sago flour is harvested from the uncultivated or semi-cultivated trees that grow nearby, and it is processed manually or with a minimum of machinery. Because the demand for sago flour at present is not high, the current supply and production rate is sufficient to fulfill the needs of the people who consume it on a daily basis. With the current production system and technology,

sago flour might not be as readily available as rice if the majority of the Tolaki in Tomeka began consuming sinonggi as their staple food. Thus, the readoption of sinonggi as an ethnic and regional staple has the potential to reactivate its production and processing practices. Similar to what Gutierrez (1984) found for crawfish in Louisiana, sinonggi's past inferior status may be redefined as a symbol of ethnic pride; however, the production and consumption of those foods (crawfish and sinonggi) may remain limited to their own home regions.

In the end, sinonggi to me is a reflection of simplicity and modesty, which are claimed to be the important characteristics of Tolaki culture. The social function of mosonggi helps maintain social unity, which is a core value in Tolaki culture. I have to admit that at the beginning of my stay among the Tolaki, I too used the consumption of sinonggi as a cultural performance, to show people that I respected them in the hope that they would accept my presence among them. I learned that for many of the Tolaki families I encountered, an outsider's willingness to eat and participate in mosonggi with them is a sufficient gesture of acceptance and respect. When the experience of mosonggi is shared, the practice can have great power to connect people and to deepen relationships and mutual understanding.

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## Notes

1. The names of places and research participants in this chapter are all pseudonyms.
2. I use *wild sago* to refer to sago trees that research participants stated they did not plant. By *semi-cultivated* I refer to sago trees that were deliberately planted but not actively cared for.
3. Indonesians grow and consume several varieties of wetland and upland rice. Indonesians who live in the United States usually prefer the taste of Jasmine rice among the rice varieties sold in U.S. grocery stores.
4. Though migration of people from different islands, including Java, began long before 1968, the first official transmigration to Southeast Sulawesi was recorded in 1968 (Government of Indonesia 1992).

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## *When the Marginal Becomes the Exotic*

### The Politics of Culinary Tourism in Indigenous Communities in Rural Mexico

Lois Stanford

Anthropologists have long examined the persistence of indigenous life-ways and subsistence systems, studying the manner in which these peoples continue to reproduce foodways historically devalued by national elite and dominant cultures. These so-called marginal foods often occupy a central place in the reproduction of social life, relations, and cultural identity within the community. At the same time that indigenous producers and workers have exited to participate in a commercial economy outside their community, their control over their indigenous foodways has afforded them some degree of autonomy and sovereignty in maintaining the authenticity of their local culture. Some food studies scholars have focused on the historic role of external forces, such as national government or commercial interests, in shaping consumer tastes and using cuisines for the purpose of constructing national identities (Belasco and Scranton 2002). This perspective has often constructed a dynamic struggle between the interests of the national government and its elites on the one hand, and local communities on the other.

Yet, in other situations, as in the case examined here of indigenous cuisine and women chefs in the highlands of Michoacán, Mexico, government authorities can come to value and promote regional cuisines. Recent research on tourism and, in particular, culinary tourism, recognizes

the public's growing interest in diverse cuisines and cultures, thus assigning new value to marginal foods deprecated in the past (Long 2004). The culinary tourist seeks out the exotic, the culturally distinctive, and the authentic, experiencing difference through the senses of smell, touch, and taste. Recognizing the strong link between food and place, culinary tourism scholars address the inherent complexity and contradictions in this transformation process at the local level (Long 2004:10–14). Culinary tourism can play an important role in promoting locality and local identities, but at the same time external interests and government programs may impact and change local foodways, cuisines, and notions of authenticity. As Elizabeth Finnis notes in the introduction, when outside interests intervene to appropriate and repackage marginal foods, this process calls into question the persistence of authenticity. It is critical to examine the process of constructing authenticity, or *authentification*, as described by Sims (2009:329). In each specific case, the arena of culinary tourism constitutes a socially and politically constructed space in which local-level effects and meanings are negotiated.

In many ways, culinary tourism reflects national and regional responses to globalized tourism, offering the local and regional experience as an “authentic” alternative. In this engagement, national and regional agents may use culinary tourism as a means by which to influence and define the tourist experience, recognizing the marketability of local culture and of defending regional interests vis-à-vis globalized tourism. In particular, food—that is, local authentic cuisine—affords the tourist a physical, gustatory sensation of the “local” (Richards 2002). Regional food cultures enhance the capacity of tourist destinations to distinguish themselves from other regions and to attract tourists (Beer et al. 2002). At the same time, culinary tourism initiates a process of social and cultural change that both impacts and offers new opportunities for local participants. That is, it constructs a new social space within which external agents (national governments or visiting tourists) on the one hand, and host communities or host cultures on the other, negotiate their respective influences over local culture, identity, and livelihoods through foodways. In many cases, this “space” may represent a food event, a ritual clearly bounded in time and space, as McAndrews (2004:114–28) examines in her study of the Hawaiian Poke Festival. In this context, the food event provides the space within which to examine how control over the meaning, interpretation, and authenticity of local foodways is negotiated.

In Mexico, many consumers express concern about the rapid expansion of processed foods, increased health problems, and decline in

consumption of traditional Mexican foods. Food has become deeply tied to Mexican national identity, regional culture, and politics, thus situating itself in the center of new political debates. The Mexican government now actively promotes regional cuisines as part of its cultural patrimony, both advocating for conservation of traditional foodways and promoting programs in support of these efforts. Government agencies encourage indigenous women to present their indigenous cuisine, known in Mexico as *gastronomía tradicional*, at regional fairs for tourists. This newfound state interest in regional culinary tourism has focused its initial efforts in the three states of Michoacán, Oaxaca, and Puebla. The case of Michoacán provides an opportunity to examine the historical processes that have shaped indigenous foodways and the manner in which Purhépecha women chefs now negotiate current efforts to promote their cuisine.

## Indigenous Foodways in Mexico

Since the Conquest, Mexican cuisines have reflected the contradictions of race and class that characterized Mexican colonial society. Throughout the Spanish colonial period, the elite of Mexico City and the provincial capitals continued to look to Spain as the source of their culinary inspiration. Even following Mexican Independence, as Mexicans struggled to construct a new national identity, culinary efforts continued to draw on European, in particular French, culinary models, and Mexico's culinary elite conceptualized the development of cuisines within an evolutionary model, one that led from indigenous—described as the “poor people” and “barbarous tribes”—to progressive and modern cuisines (Bak-Geller Corona 2009). In the twentieth century, following the Mexican Revolution, middle-class and upper-class Mexicans drew on North American kitchen technology and foodways as evidence of Mexican national progress and modernization, enjoying the tastes of more exotic indigenous foodways while on vacation or touring (Pilcher 2004:83–85).

In the provinces, regional elites historically neither recognized nor valued indigenous foodways. In his travels through Michoacán in the early twentieth century, Lumholtz (1973:407–41) contrasted the Tarascan (or Purhépecha) diet, characterized by beans, corn tortillas, and wild-gathered herbs, with that of the provincial town of Uruapan, renowned for its excellent coffee and fine wines. Michoacán's provincial towns, including Morelia, Zamora, Pátzcuaro, and Uruapan, were known more for their Spanish and mestizo cuisines than for indigenous foodways. In 1896, Vicenta

Torres de Rubio, a renowned chef in the state capital of Morelia, published a cookbook of classic regional recipes. Although it included short sections on salsas, *atoles*, and different chiles, the cookbook contained mostly recipes from a European-based cuisine, such as recipes for *bacalao* (salt cod), Spanish tortillas, empanadas, meat dishes, and flan (Torres de Rubio [1896] 2004). In Michoacán, provincial mestizos might enjoy some traditional indigenous dishes while attending a feast day or might purchase prepared items, such as atole or *nactamales*, from Puhépecha women vendors in the provincial market.

The Puhépecha people, historically known as the Tarascans, were concentrated in the central western Mexican state of Michoacán, in the highland region commonly known as the Meseta Puhépecha. From an estimated population of 400,000 prehistorically, their numbers declined dramatically because of disease and violence during the early years of the colonial period. During the colonial period, the Puhépecha were economically, politically, and culturally transformed through the introduction of new crops, Catholicism, and the development of commercial craft specialization (Verástique 2000). Many traditions and cultural practices commonly associated with Puhépecha culture were in fact historical introductions during the colonial period. In the case of food production, indigenous producers continued to grow maize, beans, and squash, but they adopted European vegetables (including lettuce, carrots, garlic, and onions); beans (including lentils and chickpeas); and orchard fruits (such as peaches, apples, pears, and quince) (West 1948:ff). Yet, despite major political, economic, and agricultural changes, the Puhépecha maintained many cultural practices, including language, religious practices, social relations, and foodways, through which they both defined their indigenous identity and distinguished themselves from mestizos.

Even into the early twentieth century, anthropological research in rural Michoacán documented the persistence of these traditional foodways. In his research in Tzintzuntzan, a community situated close to Lake Pátzcuaro, George Foster heralded the “well-developed culinary arts”: “The variety of available foods, the number of herbs used in cooking, and the varied recipes known are outstanding in every sense of the word. Naturally, few housewives have time to make every meal a gastronomic delight, but when the occasion presents itself—wedding, death, or church fiesta, most can turn out a meal that should be long remembered” (Foster 1948:48).

After the 1940s, improved roads and greater access to processed foods through stores in Pátzcuaro began to change local diets in Tzintzuntzan (Kemper 1996:388). In more isolated communities, fairly traditional food

production and consumption systems continued into the 1980s (Illsley et al. 1988:246). In the summers of 2006 and 2007, I returned to the same Purhépecha community presented in Illsley and colleagues' study, and my discussion of food provisioning reflects the work of those colleagues, as well as interviews I and my student, María Harvey, conducted. Purhépecha villages acquired foods in three ecological zones: (1) the forest, where they gathered wild foods; (2) the *milpas*, the plots where they grew corn, beans, and squash; and (3) the *ecuaros*, home gardens where women grew a variety of herbs and vegetable crops. These realms also were separated along gender lines, as men tended to carry out most of the work in the milpa, while women assumed primary responsibility for the ecuaro. The home garden traditionally contained a wide range of horticultural crops, medicinal plants, fruit trees, and ornamentals. Women intensively managed the plants, selecting seeds and exchanging plant material through local kin networks. In total, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Purhépecha agricultural complex encompassed an estimated 30 varieties of maize, 22 different horticultural crops, 23 fruit crops, 12 different wild greens, 10 different kinds of mushrooms, 5 herbs, 6 plants used to make drinks or teas, and 22 animal species (Illsley et al. 1988:249–50). At the same time that the Purhépecha participated in Michoacán's regional economy through timber harvesting, crafts production, and commercial maize production, individual households' survival continued to depend on the subsistence foods harvested in the farm plots and house gardens.

Furthermore, in rural kitchens, even into the 1980s, women continued to prepare an indigenous cuisine that relied heavily on plant foods and steamed or stewed vegetables, with little meat. In contrast with what is commonly recognized as “Mexican” cuisine, the traditional Purhépecha cuisine was primarily vegetable based, containing little or no fat, little meat, and limited use of dairy products. Maize composed the fundamental base of the indigenous foodways, either consumed alone (as in tortillas) or combined with a myriad of other vegetable and fruit products. In addition to tortillas, the Purhépecha also consumed maize in the form of atole, a thick masa drink; *atápakuas*, masa-based soups; and *tamals*, masa balls or cylinders. Within these basic categories of foods, the addition of different ingredients created a wide range of different dishes, all individually recognized by the Purhépecha. For example, atoles could be sweet or salty, depending on the addition of spices, fermented grains, sugarcane, or fresh fruit; in all, the Purhépecha consumed an estimated twenty-five different types of atoles. *Atápakuas* might contain vegetables, ground seeds, wild mushrooms, wild greens, fish, small amounts of cheese, or insect larvae.

These different soups were identified by different names throughout the region. Finally, the tamal category was characterized by the use of maize or masa in different forms. *Corundas*, for example, are small balls of masa mixed with lard, often in the shape of stars, wrapped in fresh or dehydrated maize leaves. In contrast, *uchepos* are fresh corn tamals, containing no additional ingredients and always wrapped in fresh maize leaves. *Nacatamales* are masa tamals made without lard and usually containing small amounts of meat and salsa.

Within the household and community, the seasonal agricultural cycle structured the consumption of certain foods and, thus, certain dishes. The greatest diversity of fresh vegetables, mushrooms, herbs, and fruits was always available during the rainy season, between June and December, whereas household consumption relied more on stored foods, particularly dry grains, during the dry season from January to May. Certain foods are traditionally associated with certain seasons, as for example, the active mushroom gathering and marketing associated with the early rainy season.

Within the household, food provisioning also has remained an important social arena within which family members reinforce social and kinship ties to one another. Food-processing activities have always been labor-intensive, requiring the coordinated efforts of women working together for long periods to grind the maize, prepare the sauces, and manually shape food dishes such as tamals. The stone tools used in these food-processing activities, such as the metates, *molcajetes*, and manos, are passed down from mothers or grandmothers to daughters, thus reinforcing kinship ties across generations. In the activities themselves, grandmothers and mothers teach their daughters traditional methods of food preparation, women work collaboratively, and, through it all, women talk to each other, sharing information about the community, local traditions, and so on (Harvey 2008). Meals are eaten within the kitchen; women prepare and cook tortillas, or heat food dishes, while men sit next to the hearth, conversing.

Many traditional foods also are associated with the annual cycle of feast days and religious offerings. For example, *uchepos* traditionally are served as offerings during ritual feast days that occur during the mid-rainy season. As well, the *corunda* symbolizes renewal of humans and is traditionally served at the New Year celebration. *Nacatamales* are traditionally served on the Day of the Dead, since the masa represents the meat of the dead. In the lake region near Pátzcuaro, a large tamal of white fish, wrapped in chayote leaves, is traditionally served as an offering to Jesus Christ during Holy Week. In pre-Hispanic times, the same kind of tamal was made from

white fish caught at night during the full moon, and then prepared as an offering from Nana Kutzi (Mother Moon) to Tata Jurita (Father Sun).

In turn, these dishes formed important components of the Purhépecha seasonal ritual cycle. Traditional dishes, such as *churipo* (a meat stew) and *uchepos*, are consumed during communal religious celebrations. In Purhépecha communities and even in rural communities of mixed ancestry such as Tzintzuntzan, traditional dishes continue to be prepared for feast days throughout the ritual cycle. As Kemper notes, “the more ceremonial the occasion, the more ‘traditional’ the menu offered to the guests” (1996:389). Thus, even in communities where daily diets conform more to mestizo patterns, preparing and serving traditional indigenous dishes remains an important practice in the conservation of traditional identities and maintenance of social ties within the community and kin networks. Furthermore, ceremonial meals are also much more highly organized in terms of expectations for people’s behavior, order of service, and consumption of foods that carry symbolic meaning. They represent “stage performances” (see Brandes 1990:173), but more importantly, they are ritual performances that are controlled within the community.

As well, the food preparation for these communal feast days entails cooperative preparation by women within extended kin groups, thus incorporating large groups of women in several days of collaborative planning, coordinating, and cooking (Harvey 2008). The meals themselves are communal, bringing together large groups of people, often the broader network of extended kin from within and outside of the community. Food sharing in ceremonial meals is highly organized and structured, involving the offering of food to guests and extended conversation (Harvey 2008).

Throughout Michoacán, residents of nearby provincial towns and Mexican tourists often enter the village space to attend ceremonial feasts and local food events, in order to see processions and dances, and also for the food. This space mirrors those described in other studies, such as the Big Island Poke Festival in Hawaii (McAndrews 2004) and the food enclaves described in Keller Brown and Mussell (1984). Yet important differences remain, leading to different conclusions about who controls the event and the “authenticating” process. In Michoacán, the communities themselves organize the feast days for community residents. Local women cooperate to prepare the dishes in their own kitchens, with the assistance of daughters and daughters-in-law. Thus, a great deal of the construction of, that is, preparation for, the event takes place behind the scenes, in the privacy of women’s kitchens. Although indigenous women do not engage in the kind of public discourse often associated with mestizo women (as described

in Christie 2002), older women subtly reinforce cultural norms and accepted social practices as they teach younger women to prepare the traditional foods for communal events. The intent and organization of these events for the most part lie clearly within community control. Mestizos from neighboring towns or Mexican tourists may enter the village space to watch and to eat, but they are clearly the outsiders.

The women we interviewed expressed some of the same ambivalence and resentment identified in other multiethnic food festivals (McAndrews 2004), but they couch these opinions in comments, gossip, and anecdotes, not in public expressions within the event. As well, Puhépecha women chefs are fully aware of the contradictions inherent in provincial residents entering their villages to consume traditional indigenous food on feast days and yet obliquely mistreating and disparaging Indians in normal daily encounters (see also Bentley 2004).

## **Food and Cultural Patrimony in Mexico**

The Mexican cuisine has preserved its indigenous roots at the same time as it has assimilated external influences. By the sixteenth century, Mexican cuisines had been enriched without losing their original character. Within indigenous communities, traditional foodways were conserved, remaining grounded in rituals, the natural environment, and the maintenance of community social ties. Beyond a gastronomic effort of cookbooks and traditional foodways, they are complex cultural systems of agricultural uses, traditions, and symbols, permeated with religious symbolism and grounded in rituals that, beginning with maize, represent the creation of Mesoamerican humans, coexistence in harmony with the natural environment, and secular social ties and practices—festivities, planting and harvesting calendars, funerary uses, and other indigenous and mestizo customs—that enable nutritional equilibrium and an enormous variety of characteristic plates.<sup>1</sup>

By the mid-1990s, Mexican food scholars and representatives from Mexico's Ministry of Tourism recognized the critical role of culinary tourism and of regional cuisines in tourism. In 1999, UNESCO declared Puebla as the permanent seat of the Congress of Gastronomic Patrimony and Culinary Tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean. Held every year, this conference has provided a venue through which regional food advocates can disseminate information about regional efforts and can organize collaborative efforts to shape Mexico's food and tourism policies.

Michoacán culinary researchers and tourism proponents have been active in the organization from the start.

Drawing on this international recognition, in 2005, Mexico mounted a political campaign to have UNESCO declare Mexico's regional cuisines as part of its cultural patrimony. Developed within the National Coordination of Cultural Patrimony, Development, and Tourism for Culture and the Arts (CONACULTA), this project drew support from the Ministry of Tourism, the Council on Tourist Promotion, and Mexican restaurant owners, among other government agencies and private supporters. The Mexican petition contended that UNESCO had already recognized other intangible cultural products in 1998 by creating a category of international distinction to recognize works of oral and intangible heritage. As an example, Mexico's Day of the Dead was awarded this distinction in 2003. Given that Mexican foodways clearly represented more than a culinary act and reflected a cultural system, the Mexican government argued that Mexico's foodways were a source of sustenance and culture.<sup>2</sup> The proposal cited three regions recognized for their traditional cuisines and state-level efforts to preserve indigenous foodways: Michoacán, Oaxaca, and Puebla.

In the discussions that followed the 2005 petition, food advocates consciously linked the globalization of Mexico's food industry—as exemplified through the presence of supermarkets, the introduction of new forms of eating (fast food), and the influence of foreign cuisines, among other processes—to the decline in prestige of Mexico's own regional cuisines. In its proposal to UNESCO, the Mexican government argued that UNESCO's recognition of Mexican foodways as an inherent and critical part of national cultural patrimony would not only acknowledge Mexico's cultural gastronomy but also furnish a means to challenge its culinary deterioration. In the words of one organizer,

What is Mexico going to do as a country if Mexico is on the list? Once we identify the challenges that face Mexican popular and traditional cooking, we identify the problems. . . . To defend our traditional foodways, we are defending our culture and economy. We have to be conscious of this and to make Mexicans, as individuals and communities, discern between a bag of imported potato chips and potatoes grown in our own country.<sup>3</sup>

Just as the UNESCO proposal reflected a growing recognition of the value of indigenous cuisines, government efforts simultaneously moved politically to construct a commonly recognized Mexican indigenous

cuisine, one that promoted and assigned prestige to Central Mexican foodways while downplaying other regional cuisines. As Mexican food scholars, in particular Steffan Ayora-Díaz (2010), have noted, this effort has obscured the traditions of other regions, such as the Yucatán, whose cuisine contrasts markedly with that of Central Mexico, reflects regional history, and incorporates other cultural influences.

In September 2005, Mexico dispatched a delegation to Paris, France, to present culinary demonstrations and workshops to UNESCO authorities as part of the Program of Mexican Gastronomy week.<sup>4</sup> Traveling with the national delegation were representatives from Michoacán, including the state minister of tourism. In discussing Michoacán residents' ambivalence about their own regional cuisine, he reflected on the public/private dichotomy, commenting, "Inside our homes, we eat our food and we are proud of it, but outside, we have to appear modern and international, because we have to eat what appears good, that is, Italian, English, or French." In contrast, in his speech during the Michoacán dinner at the Paris event, he heralded the virtues of Michoacán's traditional foodways, citing the central symbolism of the *paranguas*, the three stones supporting the family hearth, and of maize, as the primary ingredient in many traditional Purhépecha dishes. He stressed the notion of authenticity, linking the quality of the dishes to the history, symbolism, and culture behind them. Throughout this speech, he drew on traditional symbols from the Purhépecha kitchen and, in turn, presented them to the French audience as evidence of his own knowledge and grounding in the indigenous cuisine.

Meanwhile, indigenous women chefs from Purhépecha villages in Michoacán were preparing traditional dishes, including churipo, atápakuas, uchepos, and nacatamales in a hotel kitchen in Paris, under the supervision of a head chef from a Mexican restaurant in France. In fact, a group of executive chefs from Mexican restaurants in Paris, all mestizos, had selected the various indigenous women who would prepare the main banquet, the three dinners (one for each state's cuisine), and the cocktail reception at the UNESCO offices. These executives oversaw the preparation of all the dishes and determined who was invited to the different events. Thus, while the Michoacán state minister of tourism was lauding the value of indigenous cuisine and in essence claiming it as if it were his own, the fact that the entire event was mediated by mestizo executives discounted the long legacy of knowledge, conservation, and heritage that lay behind the dishes presented to the UNESCO panel.

Several Purhépecha women who cooked for the event described the difficulty of preparing traditional foods outside of their own kitchens,

complaining that the dishes tasted different, that they lacked the usual *sabor*, or flavor. Other women who were passed over as cooks later commented, in the safety of their own kitchens, that the invitees had been selected because of their connections and influence, not their culinary skills. For the women who were invited to cook, journeying to Paris to prepare their traditional dishes represented an important opportunity to share their culinary and cultural heritage. However, unlike the ceremonial feast days in their hometowns, the UNESCO food program in Paris was a social and political space over which the Purhépecha women had little or no control. Government officials brought them along to cook, not to present their own visions of the important role of their cuisine in preserving their indigenous heritage.

Ironically, the fifteen UNESCO judges charged with the final evaluation of Mexico's proposal were not even in Paris for the event. They remained in their home countries, around the world, reviewing the written proposal submitted by Mexico.<sup>5</sup> In the end, they rejected the proposal and the designation of Mexico's cuisine as a national cultural patrimony. In short, foreigners who never tasted the dishes nor met the indigenous women who prepared them ultimately passed international judgment on the value of Mexico's regional cuisines.

## Culinary Tourism in Michoacán

Despite the failure of the UNESCO proposal, Michoacán state agencies have continued to promote and develop culinary tourism, primarily based around the indigenous Purhépecha cuisine. Among their promotion efforts are national advertising campaigns, publication of cookbooks, subsidized credit for indigenous food restaurants, and most importantly, the promotion of annual food events. Promoting culinary tourism has fostered an ambiguous and contradictory situation that on one hand recognizes and assigns value to indigenous foodways, as witnessed by the growth of local and regional food events, while on the other hand appropriating and transforming the community-level structure of indigenous foodways.

The documentation and recording of indigenous foodways creates a formal record of recipes and dishes that did not exist previously. The Ministry of Tourism and CONACULTA have promoted the Purhépecha cuisine through the publication of specialty cookbooks and volumes heralding Michoacán's culinary treasures. These cookbooks contain not only recipes, but also discussion of the characteristic ingredients and

preparation methods of indigenous cuisines (see, for example, Martínez, Méndez, and Martínez 2004; Méndez and Martínez 2005). In 2006, Michoacán achieved international recognition when the Academy of Spanish Gastronomy awarded first place to *Paranguas: hogar de manjares Michoacanos* (Ríos, Barrios, and Jiménez 2006), a book of photographs of Purhépecha women chefs and their recipes. When he traveled to Madrid to accept the award, the renowned Mexican photographer Adalberto Ríos Szalay was accompanied by the Mexican ambassador to Spain, Mexico's minister of tourism, and Michoacán's minister of tourism. Acknowledging the award in a press conference, Michoacán's minister of tourism described the award as representing the recognition of Michoacán women as the repository of the cultural traditions that have passed from one generation to another, preserving the knowledge and techniques of traditional preparation. Meanwhile, Ríos interpreted the preservation of indigenous food traditions as a form of resistance, a drama, a demonstration of indigenous efforts to preserve diversity and reject the penetration of modern agricultural systems and genetically modified organisms into traditional agriculture.<sup>6</sup> Again, as was the case in Paris, none of the Purhépecha women lauded as valiant preservers of their culture were invited to the event to speak with their own voices.

At the state level, Michoacán has witnessed the growth of local food fairs and increased coverage of food events in regional newspapers, reflecting the burgeoning regional interest in indigenous foodways. The effort that has had the greatest impact on local communities however is an annual Ministry of Tourism-sponsored cooking competition and food festival known as the Encuentro de Cocineras Tradicionales de Michoacán (Meeting of Traditional Chefs of Michoacán). At the outset, the Ministry of Tourism proposed that the competition be rotated among Michoacán's provincial cities, in an effort to bring diverse indigenous cuisines to new regions throughout Michoacán. As I describe below, however, the competition has settled permanently in Morelia.

The first Encuentro de Cocineras was organized in 2004 and held in Uruapan, Michoacán. The weekend event included formal presentations by food scholars, training workshops for indigenous participants, and food demonstrations by Purhépecha women chefs. In addition to competing for awards and prizes, the indigenous chefs also sold meals, breads, tamales, and atoles to the attending public. The primary focus of the event was a competition in which the participating indigenous chefs vied for prizes in three areas: (1) design and decoration of the food stall; (2) the authenticity of a prepared dish; and (3) best menu, as judged by the

regional representativeness of a full meal.<sup>7</sup> The state recognition bestowed on the winning chefs a public legitimacy outside their community that had not previously characterized the Purhépecha culinary world. Within communities, women and family members often discussed and critiqued each other's dishes and culinary skills, but the Purhépecha understanding of the role of a chef had never included individual, public recognition.

The second Encuentro de Cocineras took place in 2005 in Pátzcuaro, a more popular tourist destination. That year's activities included presentations, training on hygienic food management, and competitive cooking demonstrations. More than fifty chefs from all over the state of Michoacán competed for the coveted prizes of most authentic dish and most traditional menu, presenting their dishes to judges from the Ministry of Tourism. As well, journalists interviewed the indigenous chefs, documenting some of the cultural information, legends, and interpretations of meaning that underlay the dishes, in recognition of the Mexican public's newfound interest in indigenous cuisines.<sup>8</sup>

In these first two annual festivals, the women brought their own cooking pots and utensils, such as metates and *comales*, essentially extending their home kitchens into the public space of the event. The women also wore their everyday clothes, some donning the dresses and headscarves worn during community festivals.

By 2006, the Encuentro de Cocineras had moved to the convention center in the state capital of Morelia, where it has been held ever since. It now draws primarily residents of Morelia, Mexican tourists, and international chefs. The shift from provincial towns to state capital reflects the increased centralization of culinary tourism in the state of Michoacán and the physical extraction of both the cuisine and the chefs themselves out of their respective home communities. Unlike in the first encuentros, the Ministry of Tourism began to invite selected indigenous chefs to participate in an attempt to organize the event more formally and to insure the representation of a range of different communities and cuisines. This selection process also began to distinguish between those women chefs who were individually recognized as the representative chefs from their respective villages and the remaining women—that is, most of the village—who were not recognized and were not invited to participate.

In 2007, the Ministry of Tourism invited forty-five indigenous women to compete in the Encuentro de Cocineras in Morelia. I attended this event, and my discussion draws on my own observations. Moving the fair to the state capital presented the indigenous women chefs with greater transportation challenges, since they were responsible for moving their

equipment and food themselves. The women received vouchers to cover lodging and food expenses while in Morelia, but they assumed responsibility for transportation costs, purchase of all food ingredients, and transport of all cooking equipment required. In preparation for the increased professionalization, the Ministry of Tourism offered courses to interested indigenous chefs during which agency representatives taught the women how to organize the stalls and tables, arrange the food, and prepare food for transport over long distances, among other technical skills. The women who participated in these training sessions adopted culinary practices and stylistic arrangements that situated them more in line with the Ministry of Tourism's conceptualization of indigenous chefs. The event was organized into two major series of activities: (1) a formal conference composed of presentations by food studies scholars, and (2) the food fair, in which invited indigenous chefs presented their traditional dishes, sold foods to tourists, and competed for prizes.<sup>9</sup>

The indigenous women chefs were "encouraged" to attend the formal conference, sitting in assigned seats in the front of a large hall. Formal presentations covered a range of food-related topics, all citing the significant contribution of indigenous foodways to the conservation of Mexican regional identity and traditional cultures. Implicit in these discussions was an alliance between Mexican chefs and food studies scholars, on the one hand, and indigenous women chefs, on the other, in defending the Purhépecha cuisine from the onslaught of "modern" Western foodways, characterized by processed junk food. Yet, contradictions and distrust underlay this alliance. Following one presentation by a CONACULTA representative, a representative from Morelia's culinary institute rose to proclaim the importance of documenting and preserving traditional recipes, ultimately expressing her hope that "this year we can share the recipes from the food event." In response, a Purhépecha woman stood up to state that her grandmother had handed these recipes down to her, and they were not hers to share. If she were to share the recipes, she asked, then "what will you need me for?"

The formal conference also included presentations by state representatives outlining financial assistance available for indigenous women who wished to establish indigenous food restaurants within their home communities. The presenters explained the loans and loan programs available, offering the women their assistance with the application process. In general, the interest rates on these loans were higher than typical small business loans, they required the designation of the woman's house lot as collateral, and the loan amount constituted a relatively minor percentage of the costs that would be incurred in opening up a commercial restaurant. None of the

indigenous women asked any questions of the presenters, although culinary students and chefs from Morelia asked numerous questions.

Over the weekend, the food fair itself was held at Morelia's convention center, drawing local residents and visiting tourists. In previous years, the food fairs had been held in the plazas of provincial towns, open to the public; by 2007, entrance to the event required purchasing a ticket, narrowing public participation. This event was marked by specific elements that heralded the transformation of Purhépecha cuisine under the promotion of culinary tourism: (1) the display and representation of the cuisine, (2) the commercialization of the food, (3) the judging, and (4) the construction of "authentic" indigenous chefs.

In comparison with earlier events, the 2007 organizers placed greater emphasis on the decoration of the stalls and presentation of the dishes. The Ministry of Tourism set up tents and tables for the attendees to eat at, and provided dishes and silverware on which the participating chefs were to serve their food. Each stall displayed a banner identifying the respective chef and her home community, and each chef was also responsible for decorating the stall and presenting the food in an "aesthetically pleasing manner." There was a marked contrast between the elaborately decorated stalls of the professional chefs, restaurant owners, and commercial food vendors versus those of many of the indigenous chefs, who adorned their tables with flowers or baskets brought from their communities. The elaborate displays and presentation contrasted markedly with earlier years as the Ministry of Tourism restructured the presentation of the food to fit more closely its expectations of the representation of an indigenous chef.

In an effort to market the indigenous dishes, the Ministry of Tourism charged an entry fee to the attendees. Upon entering the convention space, the visitors wishing to purchase food had to purchase vouchers from Ministry of Tourism representatives. Periodically throughout the two-day event, ministry staff collected the vouchers from the chefs, exchanging them for cash. As well, the Ministry of Tourism had identified in advance certain "preferred" dishes, which they promoted by identifying them on the stall's banner. Those chefs with more training and experience had prepared dishes that traveled well and stood up well over the course of the daylong event. In fact, many of these chefs had prepared most of their dishes in their home communities, drawing on the labor and assistance of their extended kin networks. They brought the already prepared food to reheat and offered a limited number of dishes, which they could highlight to the judges as particularly authentic.

Those chefs with less experience brought ingredients with them, only to face the great challenge of preparing labor-intensive traditional dishes in a

timely manner. This contrast between dishes, such as tamales, that could hold up for a day versus more fragile albeit often more traditional cuisine was apparent in the stall where my student and I worked. In an effort to present dishes containing relatively exotic and obscure wild greens and spices, and thus to demonstrate the variety and richness of the Purhépecha cuisine, our colleague opted for dishes less familiar to the tourists. She explained that the fair provided an opportunity to teach non-Purhépecha tourists about the history and diversity of her indigenous cuisine. Thus, while she prepared her dishes, carefully constructing the small tamales by hand, we frantically set up the stall, arranged the dishes, and stalled passersby who were looking to purchase food. By the time all the dishes were presented, the first dishes were cold and unpalatable. Those chefs with more competitive experience offered special dishes to the judges, courting them with their salsas and savory dishes.

During the course of the event, judges visited the different stalls, tasting the offerings and making notes on their clipboards. They interviewed the chefs, inquiring about cooking procedures, ingredients used, and so on, and recording information about the recipes. None of the women I interviewed knew who the judges were or how they had been selected. Several women commented on the irony that mestizo judges, particularly male judges, were evaluating the authenticity of indigenous food.

Finally, in the process of planning the Encuentro de Cocineras the Ministry of Tourism essentially singled out particular chefs for recognition and transformation. Ministry representatives selected the competitors from different indigenous and mestizo communities throughout Michoacán, basing their selection on the individual chef's reputation and participation in prior food events. Through this process, the Ministry of Tourism essentially branded certain individuals as the recognized chefs from their respective communities, although within the communities, other women were often recognized as equally talented and capable. The selected women were extracted from their communities and presented to the tourists in Morelia as the best of their community. Thus, food preparation, normally recognized as a collective activity within the community, became an act that distinguished individual women, granting them higher status.

## Conclusions

In Michoacán, culinary tourism has represented a complex and contradictory process, one that assigns value to indigenous foodways at the same

time as it threatens to transform it. Throughout the state, regional interest in indigenous cuisines has supported the growth of local food events, as witnessed by the revived Thirty-Eighth Annual Muestra de Comida Purhépecha, during which indigenous chefs prepared a wide range of different *atápakuas*, and the 2006 Intercultural Festival of the Indigenous Pueblos of Michoacán, which recognized the four primary ethnic groups, Purhépecha, Nahua, Mazahua, and Otomí. Yet, the heavy involvement of the state government and Ministry of Tourism in these events heralds profound shifts in the nature of indigenous foodways.

Whereas other studies have identified the local-level impacts of cultural tourism, my experience in Michoacán details a transformative process through which an indigenous cuisine and its representative chefs are extracted from their communities and fundamentally altered. The political dimensions of space offer a framework within which to examine the implications of Mexico's proposal to UNESCO and Michoacán's proposal to the Purhépecha. Within this framework, the indigenous foods traditionally produced in small fields and gardens for consumption within the Purhépecha community are physically and metaphorically transformed as they are extracted out of their home environments for presentation to outsiders. This extraction has implications for the participation of indigenous women chefs and the cultural embeddedness of traditional foodways. That is, the transformation process is characterized by fundamental changes in the cultural meaning of the food, the role of the chef, and the control over the cultural knowledge related to food.

First, within the Purhépecha community, the presentation of traditional food dishes is deeply embedded in traditional communal forms of food production, social relations, and ethnic identity, among other markers. In marketing their foods or presenting their dishes in regional or international food events, indigenous chefs present their exotic foodways to mestizos. Although mestizos in provincial towns have for years consumed indigenous foods on feast days and local celebrations, Mexico's promotion of regional cuisines now grants indigenous foods a greater status and value.

Yet, by the time these women carry their cuisine to Morelia, the culture and community that lies behind their indigenous foodways has faded. What remains is their representation of their cuisine and themselves as indigenous chefs to an audience much more interested in the "dish" than in the women themselves. The farther the food is carried from the indigenous community, the more superficial the foodways become. By the time the Purhépecha chefs arrived in Paris to present their dishes, they were completely removed from their kitchens and were no longer even

in charge of preparing their own dishes. The confrontation between the director of the culinary institute and the indigenous chef over sharing of recipes raises a critical issue of ownership. If the chefs of Paris and Mexico City can prepare Purhépecha dishes without the indigenous chefs, then what will become of the chefs and the communities that bred them?

Second, the emergence of identified indigenous chefs, recognized as such outside of their own community, reflects the construction by outsiders of an elite group of “authentic” indigenous chefs. Following the earlier model established in the promotion of indigenous feast days and the traditional crafts industry (Morales Cano and Mysyk 2004), the Ministry of Tourism promotes events that encourage individual competition within this select group. These women now compete with each other, vying for designation as the creator of the “most traditional food dish,” among other categories. Not only do these women compete with each other across communities; they also compete with other women within their own community for the opportunity to participate in these spotlighted events. In our own experience at the 2007 food fair in Morelia, as we moved back and forth between the stalls of the two chefs from the same community, each woman would question us about the dishes prepared by the other, the ingredients, and the procedures used. Back in the community, the women left behind questioned why certain women had been invited and not others, and made some detrimental comments about the invitees' cooking skills. Buried deep within the gossip and hints of intrigue was simmering conflict among women from the same community, driven by the opportunities afforded to some but denied to others.

Furthermore, the Encuentro de Cocineras in Morelia highlighted the nature of “representation,” of both self and the cuisine, by distinguishing between those chefs who fit the image of “indigenous chef” marketed by the Ministry of Tourism and those who were less skilled at marketing themselves. The contrast was notable between the previous, more local food fairs, where indigenous women chefs showed up in their everyday dress, dragging their metates and pots with them, and the 2007 event in the capital, where many of the women wore embroidered blouses and new skirts, with ribbons braided in their hair.

Third, since the focus of the Ministry of Tourism, mestizo culinary experts, and food studies scholars lies primarily on the dish, or *platillo*, there exists a risk of loss of cultural knowledge. For those representatives of the Ministry of Tourism now extolling the virtues and heritage embedded in Purhépecha foodways, the focus remains on the indigenous dish, the final product. Truly recognizing and heralding the value of indigenous cuisines

requires problematizing the cuisine itself. Behind the dishes lies the culture: the complexity of the seasonal agricultural cycle, the ties between the land and the food, the dependence on the conservation of biological diversity in order to preserve the foodways, and the role of family and communal ties in preparing and serving these dishes. In Michoacán, culinary tourism has tended to overlook the critical role of the production and cultural knowledge systems that lie behind indigenous foodways. The conservation of indigenous cuisines and traditional foodways lies not only in the collection of recipes and valorization of indigenous dishes. It lies also in the conservation of seeds, biological diversity in the gardens, and social organization of production; that is, the agricultural heritage that underlies indigenous cuisines.

## Notes

1. “¿Comida mexicana, patrimonio de la humanidad?” *El Clarín.com*, October 3, 2005, [www.clarin.com/diario/2005/09/200/conexiones/](http://www.clarin.com/diario/2005/09/200/conexiones/).

2. “Promoverán riqueza cultural de gastronomía Mexicana,” *El Universal*, 2005, [www.eluniversal.com.mx](http://www.eluniversal.com.mx).

3. “Promueven en París a la comida mexicana,” *Arte Culinario*, October 3, 2005, [www.arteculinario.com.mx/noticias/noticias/](http://www.arteculinario.com.mx/noticias/noticias/); my translation.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Mireya Cuellar, “CONACULTA y gobiernos estatales cabildean con comida en París,” *La Jornada*, September 15, 2005, [www.jornada.unam.mx/](http://www.jornada.unam.mx/).

6. Isabel Martínez Pita, “Cocinar, un acto de amor entre el pueblo mexicano de Michoacán,” *Excelsior*, March 26, 2006, [www.ocexcelsior.com/mis-tradiciones/tradiciones/2006/marzo/0310\\_mis\\_trad\\_mich](http://www.ocexcelsior.com/mis-tradiciones/tradiciones/2006/marzo/0310_mis_trad_mich).

7. Luis Gabino Alzati, “Se realizará en Uruapan el Encuentro de Cocineras Tradicionales de Michoacán,” *La Jornada de Michoacán*, November 4, 2004; Cynthia Ayala Jiménez, “Inicia hoy el Encuentro de Cocineras Tradicionales Michoacanas en Uruapan; participarán investigadores,” *La Jornada de Michoacán*, November 6, 2004, [www.lajornadamichoacan.com.mx/2004/11/06/06n2fn.html](http://www.lajornadamichoacan.com.mx/2004/11/06/06n2fn.html).

8. Carlos F. Márquez, “La cocina tradicional festiva, acto de convivencia con lo sagrado,” *La Jornada de Michoacán*, December 5, 2005; Katia Ramírez-Blankley, “Recetas legendarias de Michoacán,” *La Opinión Digital*, December 14, 2005, [www.laopinion.com/print.html?rkey=000051213291528718926](http://www.laopinion.com/print.html?rkey=000051213291528718926).

9. Represented in this food event were two women chefs, cousins from the community of San Lorenzo, located in the district of Uruapan, Michoacán, whom my students and I had met the previous summer. During the course of the food fair, one student and I helped out in the stall of one of the women, while another student worked in the stall of her cousin. My observations of the changes in the organization of the event and the implications of participation for indigenous women chefs are based on this experience of participant-observation, with the assistance of two graduate students, Aaron Sharratt and María Harvey.

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## *Discovering Pom's Potential*

Karin Vaneker

This essay explores the meanings of *pom*, a dish that is central in Surinamese cuisine. Pom migrated to the Netherlands, where it also came to reflect Surinamese identity. The dish serves as a way to explore integration and relationships between Western and ethnic cuisines. The examination of pom's history, its central ingredients, and memories of diasporic Surinamese serves to illustrate how a dish from a marginalized but distinctive food culture is popularized in a host culture. Drawing on my ongoing research into the history, meanings, and contemporary practices of pom preparation and consumption, this chapter demonstrates how a distinct food culture reflects the surrounding culture and also shows that a distinctive dish from a marginalized country can reflect as well as affect a minority culture's position in their host culture (Tuomainen 2009).

### **Longing, Belonging**

*Oh Nederland, geef mij Rijst met Kousenband*

(Please, Netherlands, give me rice and yard-long string beans)

— 1960S POP SONG SUNG BY MAX WOISKI JR.<sup>1</sup>

Whether it is for grandmother's apple pie or a soup eaten on vacation, at one point or another in our lives most of us experience a certain level of "homesickness for food." Thus, aside from being a biological necessity,

food provides comfort, security, and a sense of belonging. Whenever the conditions of life change, people tend to hold on to their food preferences and their ways of eating for comfort (Van Otterloo 1990, 210–11). Migrants may have a stronger than typical appetite for familiar foods, ingredients, and dishes, and having access to such foods can provide a sense of belonging. When in a new environment, migrants may create surroundings in which they can prepare familiar dishes. In postwar Europe, decolonization and the growing demand of manufacturing industries for low-skilled labor resulted in a massive influx of immigrants. The intra-regional migration from south to north and from the former colonial territories caused a significant change in the European demographic makeup in the second part of the twentieth century (Kloosterman and Rath 2003).

In order to fulfill immigrants' psychological and physical appetites, especially in the last quarter of the twentieth century, small ethnic (migrant) businesses started to mushroom in many European countries (Kloosterman and Rath 2003). Particularly in larger cities, myriad products, services, and new and “exotic” foodstuffs became available. With immigrants sticking together and entrepreneurs starting to operate in and from captive environments, ethnic businesses were often depicted as of low social status. Simultaneously, the different manners in which their merchandise and foodstuffs were displayed gave migrants and their communities a higher visibility in the societies they entered (Kloosterman and Rath 2003).

At the same time, due to globalization and internationalization, in most Western societies in and around the 1960s, a culinary transformation took place. In restaurants and at home, dishes and ingredients from non-Western cuisines were adopted and gained popularity. An increasing number of westerners developed a taste for the “exotic” and cheap merchandise of migrants. As a result, ethnic foods and dishes may often be adopted and accepted more quickly than the people bringing them (Möhrling 2008; Vaneker 2007a; Wilson 2004).

This is certainly the case in the Netherlands, where immigrant food businesses are flourishing. As in many Dutch cities, in Amsterdam the presence of immigrant entrepreneurs is anything but an exception (Kloosterman and Rath 2003). Stores, street vendors, snack bars, cafés, and eateries offer a great variety of ethnic food, ranging from Chinese and Vietnamese egg rolls, Turkish bread, and Indian curries to Italian ice cream, Indonesian *saté* (satay), and Surinamese bread rolls. In western European countries eating “ethnic” in restaurants and cooking “exotic” dishes at home have become one of the most popular aspects of the food-service industry and domestic cuisine (Möhrling 2008; Van Otterloo 1990). In the

Netherlands in recent years, pom, a dish that holds a central place in the life of Surinamese immigrants, is rapidly gaining popularity outside the Surinamese community.

Pom is an oven-baked dish that combines native and foreign ingredients, foodways, and cultures, and derives its name from one of its central ingredients: the tuber *pomtajer* (*Xanthosoma* spp.). “Common” taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) and varieties of *pomtajer* are the most widely grown and consumed aroids. Although all parts of the plant are edible, Surinamese consume only the root sections: the corm and cormels. Surinamese use the corm almost exclusively for pom, and the cormels sometimes for soup. There are several common names for *pomtajer*, and these tend to be very confusing. In part this confusion reflects the reality that when aroids are referred to as food, the generally accepted term is *taro*. Secondly, aroids have many similar characteristics that only a trained eye can distinguish, and as a result and especially in the Western world, taro corms and cormels often become confounded. Over time, common taro and *pomtajer* started carrying several overlapping names, such as *cocoyam*, *malanga*, *tannier*, *tajer*, *taya*, and *eddoe* (Vaneker 2009, 216–18). In the Surinamese community, *pomtajer* is most commonly referred to by that name, but the variety used for pom also is known as the *tajer* (or *taya*). This helps to distinguish it from common taro, which in Surinamese cuisine is a well-known and frequently used ingredient.

## The Netherlands and Suriname

In the Netherlands the first encounter with “exotic” food on a large scale occurred shortly after World War II, with the arrival of more than 200,000 immigrants<sup>2</sup> from the Dutch colony then known as the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia. Although the contrast between the refined Indonesian and plain Dutch cuisines is vast, Indonesian food nevertheless became widely adopted, both at home and in restaurants (Van Otterloo 1990). This fact is reflected in the Netherlands and in ethnic Dutch food stores in North America, where Indonesian foods and products are often available alongside Dutch ones.

This did not happen, however, with the cuisine of Suriname, which was a Dutch colony from 1667 until 1975. At present, Suriname is the smallest independent country on the South American continent and has the most ethnically diverse population. Like elsewhere in the greater Caribbean basin, Suriname during the colonial period had a plantation

economy with a strong focus on growing cash crops such as sugar, coffee, and cacao. Many plantation owners had little or no Dutch background, coming instead from various nationalities and religious backgrounds, including German, Swiss, Hungarian, Jewish, and French Huguenot. By about 1750, there were approximately 410 plantations of which more than a quarter had Sephardic (Spanish-Portuguese) Jewish owners. After the Inquisition and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal (1492), wealthy Sephardic Jews started to settle in northern European countries, where they could profess their religion more openly. Under English rule, in the 1650s, the first Sephardic Jews settled in Suriname. At the end of the seventeenth century, and by way of Amsterdam, the first Ashkenazi Jews (of German and Eastern European origin) started to settle in Suriname. By the end of the eighteenth century, there were 1,330 Surinamese Jews, belonging to three subgroups: Sephardic, Ashkenazim, and “Colored” Jews (the children of Jewish men and enslaved women) (Vaneker 2007b).

The workforce on the Surinamese plantations consisted of West African slaves. At the end of the eighteenth century, in addition to the indigenous population, the population of Suriname consisted of more than 5,000 whites, 1,760 free nonwhites, and around 50,000 West African slaves (Van Stipriaan 1997:74–75). Before the abolition of slavery in 1863, plantation owners started to experiment with attracting foreign workers. Between 1853 and 1865 more than two thousand Chinese laborers from China arrived, and when slavery was abolished, almost seventy thousand contract workers from India and the Indonesian island of Java entered the labor force.<sup>3</sup> Although these immigrants were expected to return to their homelands after their contracts expired, most remained in Suriname, and many, especially Chinese, went into retail and food-related businesses (Hoeft 1998:ix, 12–15).

As of 2008, of the Surinamese population of around 475,000 people,<sup>4</sup> roughly 40 percent is of Indian origin, 30 to 35 percent Creole (or Afro-Surinamese), 15 percent of Javanese descent (Indonesian), and 10 percent Maroons (descendants of runaway slaves). The remainder are a mix of ethnic groups, including Amerindians, Jews, Chinese, Lebanese, Syrians, French, and Germans. Although the colonial administration's aim was assimilation, there were vast class and cultural differences across the various ethnic groups that resulted in tensions rather than a harmonious nation (Hoeft 1998).<sup>5</sup> An example of the deep-rooted ethnic tension can be found in *Reis naar de West: Suriname* (Voyage to the West: Suriname) an essay by the acclaimed Dutch author W. F. Hermans (1921–1995). While in Suriname in 1969, Hermans learned of a Negro<sup>6</sup> teacher, Devid, who was known as

a Hindustani (Indian) hater. According to the director of his school, Devid tended to give lower grades to students of Hindustani origin than to Creoles.

Despite the cultural differences and tensions among the various ethnic groups, the influence of postcolonialism has resulted in a distinctive Surinamese food culture and cuisine. A typical Surinamese meal, for instance, consists of a variety of dishes, all of different ethnic origins. In general, it is a popular belief and custom that specific dishes of different ethnic origins are best prepared by individuals of that ethnicity.

### **From Malnutrition in Suriname to Surinamese Cuisine in the Netherlands**

Surinamese cuisine is a reflection of the country's varied ethnic, social, and cultural makeup (Vaneker 2007c:32). Present-day culinary practices and skills are also a consequence of the country's past, as Suriname's colonial history consists of systematic subordination, domination, and repression of slaves. In *Slaven en vrijen onder de Nederlandse wet* (Slaves and Free Persons under Dutch Law), the liberal Dutch parliamentarian Baron W. R. van Hoëvell (1812–79) writes, “Suriname is a dark page in the history of the Netherlands and humiliates and dishonors the present-day generation, because it doesn't discontinue and annihilate the cursed slavery, a disgraceful inheritance of its fathers.”<sup>7</sup> In the book, which first appeared in 1854, Van Hoëvell openly criticized the behavior of the Dutch in Suriname and extensively described the ill treatment of slaves. Due to the under-provision of food, in combination with an unbalanced and restricted diet, which frequently consisted only of a weekly ration of bananas and dried salted cod,<sup>8</sup> many slaves died of malnutrition and starvation. Until the 1850s, death as a result of food deprivation and malnutrition was generally accepted, and often the slaves themselves were blamed for their fate (Van Hoëvell 1854). After the abolition of slavery in 1863, this chronic lack of food and malnutrition had such an impact on subsequent generations that food became one of the most important identity markers among the Afro-Surinamese community (Vaneker 2007c).

The ties between the Netherlands and Suriname were always close. Before and after the country's independence in 1975, many Surinamese migrated to the Netherlands while Dutch migrated to Suriname, which resulted in substantial populations in both countries. Ingredients and recipes were exchanged, adopted, accepted, and newly developed throughout the ethnically very diverse and multi-situated community. Over the years,

Surinamese cuisine developed into a dynamic melting pot with ethnic particularities but also a number of characteristic Surinamese dishes. This is demonstrated through the approximately twenty-three Surinamese cookbooks that have been published since 1916, in both the Netherlands and Suriname. Containing a mix of recipes of all origins, these cookbooks demonstrate the ingredients and cooking techniques commonly used in Surinamese cooking (Andringa 1986; Starke and Samsin-Hewitt 1976; Vaneker, Ouddeken, and Slaats 2008).

The most popular food-preparation technique is reflected in recipes for so-called one-pot dishes that are prepared on an open fire. Popular dishes of Afro-Surinamese origin include *her'heri*, which is prepared with *aardvruchten* (fruits of the earth), boiled pieces of roots and tubers such as cassava, sweet potato, *napi* (Indian yam or *cushcush*, *Dioscorea trifida*), and *tajer* (*Colocasia esculenta*). It is traditionally served with *bakabana* (baked plantain), peanut soup with *tomtom*,<sup>9</sup> and salted meat and cod. Indian migrants introduced lentils, roti, and the use of *masala* (a spice mixture, in the Netherlands also known as *kerriepoeder* [curry powder]). The Indonesian influence in Surinamese cuisine is reflected in *ketjap* (soy sauce), which became the popular condiment *gekruide ketjap* (spiced soy sauce). Chinese migrants introduced ginger and the use of stir-frying, which over the years evolved into numerous typical Surinamese stir-fried dishes with Chinese cabbage, smoked pork, and beef. Since prior to colonization, wheat and the use of an oven were unknown, contemporary Surinamese breads and pastries reflect the colonial past and cuisines of European countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands. In Jewish, Dutch, and British cuisines *pastei* (pies) are considered classic festive dishes. It became Surinamese tradition to serve a savory pie at celebrations and on festive occasions. Such is also the case with pom, which at present is one of the best-known and most popular Surinamese dishes.

## Without Pom There Is No Surinamese Birthday Party

Pom can be considered a typical and very characteristic Surinamese dish. The expression “without pom there is no birthday” not only illustrates how well the dish is known but also specifies one of the occasions for which it is prepared. Apart from the pomtajer, its other two central ingredients are chicken and citrus juice. The first published description of the dish is probably from 1914–17, in the *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch West-Indië*, which describes pom as follows: “The big tajer, the stalk of which grows above the earth, is grated and

treated with the juice of bitter oranges, [and] afterwards with chicken or fish, made into a pie, which is a dish known as ‘pom.’”<sup>10</sup>

The basic preparation method for pom is to peel and grate pomtajer (see figure 5.1), then mix it with citrus juice and a sauce made from oil or margarine, onions, tomatoes, salt, pepper, and nutmeg. A layer of raw pomtajer is placed in a high-sided, metal casserole dish, followed by a layer of sautéed chicken, then another layer of pomtajer. The dish is then baked in an oven for at least one hour or until the pom becomes golden brown. The baked pom is cut into pieces and either served hot with rice, potatoes, *zuurgoed* (pickles), and vegetables; or cooled and placed inside a bread roll or between slices of white bread. The latter sandwich, in both the Netherlands and Suriname, is known as *broodje pom* (see figure 5.2).

### Jewish or Creole?

Within the Surinamese community, pom is always labeled as a dish of Creole or Jewish origin. Its ingredients (particularly chicken and citrus



Figure 5.1. Preparing pom. (Photograph by Karin Vaneker)



Figure 5.2. Broodje pom. (Photograph by Karin Vaneker)

juice), its means of preparation, and the use of an oven (rather than the typical open fire) make it highly unlikely that pom is of either African or Amerindian origin. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, an oven was neither common nor frequently used in domestic Surinamese cooking. An analysis of pom's three central ingredients and its preparation technique suggests that it may originally have been a Jewish dish, associated with wealthier households that customarily employed slaves or servants. In Jewish cuisine the use of a (community) oven to prepare dishes for the Sabbath was already customary in the Middle Ages, and well-known savory casseroles include the Sephardic *hamin* and the Ashkenazi *cholent*. Because of Jewish dietary laws, the diet of Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews differed from those of fellow inhabitants of Suriname. Sabbath dishes, for instance, customarily contained meat or fowl. As mentioned previously, the slave diet consisted of bananas, roots, and tubers, and lacked meats and fowl. Although chicken became more widely available and less expensive in the last quarter of the twentieth century, until that time, chicken was expensive for the Surinamese commoner; the older generation of Afro-Surinamese still considers chicken a luxury today. In order to serve as many people as possible, pom is still today often prepared with an old, skinned “soup chicken” diced in small pieces.

Aroids contain small crystals of oxalic acid, and the pomtajer is sufficiently acidic to irritate the skin and the mouth. Extensive or prolonged consumption of oxalic acid can produce toxic physical effects, including possible kidney stones and difficulty absorbing minerals such as calcium. Common and ancient techniques to make roots and tubers digestible and to denature toxins are cooking (such as baking, roasting, and boiling), drying, and fermentation. Many Surinamese developed tricks to overcome the effect of oxalic acid when making pom. Common methods include the insertion of an old nail into the pom before baking, or adding a bit of vinegar or citrus juice. Citrus juice (in particular bitter orange juice) is a traditional and central ingredient in pom. Both chicken and citrus fruits were introduced into the Greater Caribbean by Spanish explorers. As early as the Middle Ages, Jews cultivated, consumed, and traded citrus fruits. In Jewish cuisine it is common to neutralize the smell of chicken with lemon juice. The Jewish custom of dousing raw chicken with either lemon juice or vinegar also coincidentally served to neutralize some of the oxalic acid of the pomtajer. This custom was then adopted by Afro-Surinamese, where it became a tradition to “wash” raw chicken meat with either lemon juice or vinegar (Vaneker 2007b). In oral and recorded tradition, the sauce for a traditional pom requires the juice of bitter oranges; in most contemporary pom recipes orange juice is substituted in the sauce.

In popular culture—for example in John de Bye’s<sup>11</sup> historical novel *Ter dood veroordeeld* (Sentenced to Death) (1999)—and in everyday speech, pom is often described as a potato dish of Jewish origin. Both oral Surinamese tradition and John de Bye’s novel claim that pomtajer replaced potatoes in pom around the beginning of the nineteenth century. Colonial Suriname had a plantation economy with a strong focus on growing cash crops; the production of food for local use was neglected. Many foods, such as dried and salted fish and meats, dried beans, and potatoes, had to be imported from Europe, and consequently were costly. Moreover, potatoes do not grow well in tropical and subtropical climates, so usually must be imported and are more expensive than indigenous roots and tubers such as cassava, sweet potato, and pomtajer. Consequently, potatoes were probably not a frequent ingredient in Afro-Surinamese cooking before the abolition of slavery in 1863. In the kitchens of wealthier Surinamese households of northern European descent, potatoes were common at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Then the Napoleonic Wars (1799 and 1815) prevented the importation of foods from Europe to Suriname, which makes it highly likely that pomtajer originally might have been used as a substitute for potatoes in the kitchens of wealthy Surinamese during the trade boycotts.

In comparison to preparing potatoes, the peeling and grating of fresh pomtajer is difficult and time-consuming, and cooks today often complain about the labor involved in preparing a traditional pom. The labor-intensive preparation supports the contention that pom has never been an everyday dish, but was rather prepared for special occasions. Festive dishes are often expensive, labor intensive, and considered a luxury. The *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch West-Indië* describes pom as a pie. It became a Surinamese tradition to serve pastei, a savory pie, at celebrations and festive occasions, and commonly pom and pastei are served together. Surinamese never deny that pastei was adopted from the colonists. Thus, the Afro-Surinamese community might have adopted both pastei and the oven dish pom, and together they became part of the repertoire of traditional Surinamese festive dishes.

For all these reasons, pom is likely to have originated as either a Jewish or Creole dish, although its origins continue to be a topic of discussion at Surinamese parties and festivities, on many occasions leading to fierce debates about ownership of the dish. As historian Wieke Vink puts it,

If only because every Jew of Surinamese origin claims pom as a Jewish dish, it's a fixed conversation topic at every Surinamese Jewish party. But what determines the origin of a dish? Who, for example, was in the kitchen? The Afro-Suriname house slave that prepared and improved the dish with her knowledge of roots and tubers? Or was it the plantation owner's wife in whose kitchen the pom was created? During the colonial period, the different Surinamese population groups mutually influenced each other very strongly. In addition, the Surinamese Jewish community in large part was mixed with other cultures. In most cases it is impossible to retrieve the reason or what exactly caused this so-called process of creolization. The only certainty about the origin of this Creole dish: over the course of history, more and more pom got a Jewish twist. But probably it is a Surinamese Jewish and Afro-Surinamese co-production.<sup>12</sup>

Today in the Netherlands pom is prepared with both fresh and frozen pomtajer. Given the prestige of pom, many Surinamese prefer to use fresh pomtajer over frozen to prepare it, but fresh pomtajer can only be purchased in the winter, whereas the frozen variety is available year-round. The commercial production, distribution, and export of grated and frozen pomtajer from Suriname to the Netherlands was facilitated by the influx of Surinamese after Suriname's independence in 1975.<sup>13</sup> Today, pom has become

popularized throughout the Surinamese community and is Suriname's best-known festive dish (Vaneker 2007b, 2007c). Skill in making pom also confers prestige. When girls prepare their first pom, it is customary for the whole family to come to the house to try it. It is also a popular belief that the quality of a Surinamese woman can be measured through pom: if she cannot prepare pom, she is considered a poor cook or a bad housewife (Vaneker 2007b, 2007c). Nowadays both men and women of all ages prepare the dish, and each Surinamese ethnic group makes a slightly different version. Javanese, for example, add soy sauce, Indians use piccalilli, Creoles commonly add salted beef, and Chinese variations might contain ginger and lychees.

Not only does every family have its own "secret" recipe and ingredients, there are also many stories, meanings, memories, and emotions surrounding pom (Stam 2008; Vaneker 2007b, 2007c). This is best illustrated by quotations from newspaper interviews with members of the Surinamese community regarding the meanings of pom. For example: "Pom is home, mother, party, family, warmth" (Van der Pol 2007). During the group conversations I conducted for this research, the importance of family and pom was a common theme. The importance of pom in the community and the fierce discussion that often surrounds its preparation is best illustrated by the remarks of the youngest participant in the conversations, Benito Bourne (born 1977). Bourne said, "I was born and raised in Suriname . . . what do I remember of pom? It always was associated with large family parties. Like most Surinamese, my family is huge. There were always fights between my father's brothers about who was preparing which dish. And therefore also about pom."<sup>14</sup> Natascha Adama (born 1965) remarked, "When I baked my first pom I was so afraid to spoil it,"<sup>15</sup> demonstrating the Surinamese belief that a woman's quality can be measured through her pom-making skills. Lyanda Augustzoon (born 1958) illustrated the prestige of pom by saying, "My mother's pom is the best, my grandmother's is the best";<sup>16</sup> and its role in Surinamese family life and family ties was highlighted when Juliette Emanuels (born 1927) said, "My children only eat pom when I prepare it."<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Emanuels was born and raised in Paramaribo, and arrived in the Netherlands around the age of thirty-six. She is of Sephardic Jewish origin, her family has lived in Suriname for many generations, and they observe Jewish dietary laws. During my visit to her house in Amstelveen (the Netherlands) in 2004, Mrs. Emanuels not only spoke about the Jewish origin of pom, but admitted that she chose to prepare pom in order to gather her family around the dinner table on the Sabbath. As a widow living alone, she saw her grandchildren more often if she prepared pom for the Sabbath (Vaneker 2007b).

## Pom in the Netherlands: Culinary Changes

Yet pom is not a static dish. As the recipe is transmitted from generation to generation and cooks migrate to different environments, the dish is being continually re-created and discussed. This process is not, of course, limited to pom in the Netherlands. The re-creation and reimagining of dishes and cuisines constantly takes place for a variety of different reasons, from catering to tourist tastes (McAndrews 2004), to attempting to create a concept of an authentic national identity (Stanford, this volume). Moreover, the availability of traditional ingredients is often limited. Therefore, migrants may need to find substitutes, experiment, and adapt themselves to their new conditions (Tuomainen 2009; Van Otterloo 1990:210–11).

One example of the re-creation of pom involves the type of chicken used. The older generation of Suriname-born Surinamese, especially Creoles, prefers pom prepared with chicken that contains bones, whereas the younger generation nowadays often uses boneless chicken. Such private, or in-home, changes reflect different ideas of what chicken is best, as well as socioeconomic advancement that makes more expensive cuts of chicken accessible to families.

Another change involves the way pom is cooked, consumed, and discussed in the public sphere. As noted, Surinamese cuisine is still neglected in the Netherlands. Compared with its Indonesian counterpart, which is widely known, adopted, and respected, it is still considered a marginal cuisine from a marginal country. Nevertheless, in Amsterdam the number of establishments serving Surinamese food is steadily growing (Vaneker 2007c; Van Otterloo 1990). These establishments are mostly frequented by Surinamese, students on a low budget, and people already familiar with Surinamese cuisine. Other Dutch cities, such as Rotterdam and The Hague, also have a growing number of Surinamese catering businesses, restaurants, and carryouts. Most serve pom and often also broodje pom. Broodje pom, in particular, is rapidly gaining popularity and starting to appear on the Dutch menu. It can sometimes even be ordered in Dutch carryouts and for home delivery. In an article in the free monthly magazine *Allerhande* ("Lekker Bekend: Gordon" 2007)<sup>18</sup> the popular Dutch singer Gordon named it as his favorite food. In November 2008 the magazine *NL20* ran a feature on broodjes pom in the Dutch capital. For that article rapper Negativ, a twenty-six-year-old Surinamese musician from Amsterdam, and the popular Surinamese actress Gerda Havertong visited ten eateries in various Amsterdam neighborhoods and sampled the broodje pom. Prior to the taste test, Havertong stated that, for her, pom should

taste sweet and sour, and because the meat is juicier, she prefers pom prepared with bone-in chicken. Furthermore, she cannot do without hot chili pepper and pickles. Negativ, on the other hand, claimed that he was “ver-Nederlandst” (very much assimilated to the Netherlands). He dislikes bone-in chicken, which he even considers dangerous, because chicken bones can stick in your throat. Furthermore, he does not eat pickles with his pom and claims to be perhaps the only Afro-Surinamese in the world who dislikes cucumber.<sup>19</sup>

On a scale of 1 (worst) to 10 (best), Havertong and Negativ rated Amsterdam’s worst broodje pom a 1 and the best, an 8, based on taste and the restaurant’s atmosphere, clients, staff, service, and presentation; prices ranged from €2.40 to €3.50. As Surinamese are known to be very conscious of cleanliness, this was automatically a factor in the ranking. Entering one eatery, Haverkort immediately remarked, “This little establishment looks fresh and neat. . . . Also, the toilet is super-clean.”<sup>20</sup>

In recent years not only is the popularity of broodje pom growing outside the Surinamese community, but recipes for Surinamese cuisine, and especially for pom, are also appearing more frequently in Dutch cookbooks, newspapers, magazines, and on the Internet. In Amsterdam alone there are more than 120 establishments serving Surinamese food (Vaneker 2007c). In 2000, some six Surinamese cookbooks were published, leading to articles about Surinamese cuisine appearing in popular magazines. In 2003 the cooking show *Born2Cook*, featuring Ramon Beuk, the first television chef of Surinamese origin, became popular, as did the eight cookbooks he published.<sup>21</sup> This demonstrates that the popularization of Surinamese cuisine in the Netherlands is ongoing and dynamic.<sup>22</sup>

### “Pom on the Menu”

After Suriname’s independence, many Surinamese came to live in the Zuidoost (South East) suburb of Amsterdam (formerly known as the Bijlmermeer).<sup>23</sup> Imagine Identity and Culture (Imagine IC), an Amsterdam-based center for the representation of migration and cultures from the migrants’ own perspectives, is located here.

One of Imagine IC’s central objectives is community participation. Aspha Bijnaar, of the National Institute for Dutch Slavery and Its Legacy (Ninsee), organized and chaired two focus groups about pom in March 2007, attended by approximately eighteen participants.<sup>24</sup> Topics ranged from when participants had prepared their first pom to the recipes of

their grandmothers and other family members and to happy childhood memories of Suriname. The participants happily exchanged recipes and shared preparation secrets and tips about, for instance, whether they used an old nail or orange juice to neutralize the acid in pomtajer. As I watched, pleasant conversations about these issues and how difficult it is to grate fresh pomtajer by hand rapidly evolved into a fierce discussion of ownership of the dish. One of the participants, Glenn Willemsen, captured the essence of the debate when he stated, "Well, the dominant story is . . . the Jews brought the pom. But there's also another theory saying in Africa we know the tajer (taro), too. There were people living in Africa before they lived in Suriname. And why couldn't the dish have been developed in Africa and the slaves brought it with them to Suriname? Whence comes that dominant story again about those Jews?"<sup>25</sup>

These discussions were part of an exhibition titled *Pom on the Menu* (Pom op het Menu), held at Imagine IC from May 21 to August 31, 2007. Apart from discussions about pom, collections of pom recipes, photographs, and film screenings, the exhibition displayed the ingredients. In general the cooking advice about pomtajer in relevant books and literature is that it can be cooked in the same way as most roots and tubers (Kafka 2005:362–65). Boiled, mashed, roasted, fried, or steamed; as flour, chips, pancakes, or fritters; at home, in restaurants, or in the food industry, pomtajer can be used in much the same way as potatoes. In order to explore pom's proclaimed culinary potential and inspire the participants, Mavis Hofwijk, a well-known Zuidoost-based Surinamese caterer, demonstrated how to cook pom. Two Michelin-star chefs, three artists, and a food designer were invited to experiment and create new dishes with pomtajer. Chef Thorvald de Winter of the restaurant *Apicius* in Bakkum, holder of two Michelin stars, created a pom *clafoutis*; at present this is the only pomtajer dish served in a restaurant with a two-star designation. Chef Soenil Bahadoer, holder of one Michelin star, modernized his wife's family recipe and put his gourmet version of pom on the menu in his restaurant, *De Lindehof*. Food designer Katja Gruijters used Dutch fast-food culture as a source of inspiration and presented *pom-de-friet* (French fries made with pomtajer) and the *pom-kroket* (pom croquette). Drawing on his own half-German background and the multiethnic Surinamese population, artist and food performer Freddie Beckmans served pomtajer pancakes along with Chinese chicken feet. American-born artist Debra Solomon used her own (and pom's likely) Jewish roots to prepare latkes with pomtajer and wild herbs. Senegalese<sup>26</sup> chef Oumar Mbengue Atakosso stated that in his home country

*boulettes* (balls) are a traditional preparation method for numerous ingredients, leading him to create *boulettes de pom*.

Dutch photographer Pieter Ouddeken photographed the cooking demonstrations and the final dishes. An inventory of Amsterdam-based establishments serving pom and an exhibition catalog were handed out (Vaneker 2007c). Visitors were invited to write down their own recipes and share their stories, although few did so. During the opening reception people happily shared their recipes and memories, but throughout the three-month exhibition, only a handful of visitors contributed handwritten recipes and recipes photocopied from cookbooks. However, the exhibition and the cooking demonstrations inspired several others to experiment with creating pomtajer dishes. Pay-Uun Hiu of the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* published a recipe for vegetarian pom curry (Hiu 2007). As a tribute to his roots, Surinamese pastry chef Carle Douglas created a dessert with pomtajer, cane sugar, orange, and allspice (Douglas Delights, flyer, 2007). These experiments further publicized pomtajer and confirmed its interchangeability with other tubers. Still, compared with tubers such as the potato, for which numerous recipes and preparation techniques exist, the potential of pomtajer in domestic and restaurant cooking has not yet been fully explored.

### Never Heard of It?

Ultimately, the Imagine IC exhibition triggered more than thirty articles and editorials in Dutch media, ranging from full-page articles in national newspapers to editorials in local magazines and weekly publications. Although most writers reviewed the exhibition positively, the content of the articles also confirmed the marginalized position of Surinamese cuisine and how slowly it is gaining attention from Dutch citizens. The marginalized position of Surinamese food was a frequent theme in the articles, as the following quotation illustrates: “Never heard of it? . . . Despite Suriname having been a Dutch colony for nearly 300 years, Surinamese food has, until recently, been regarded as the poor cousin of Indonesian cooking” (Layton 2007). A rap by young Afro-Dutch Surinamese dancer and poet Charissa Doelwijt and rapper Verno Romney includes the lyrics, “Actually it looks like dirty sludge; Afraid to touch it, let alone taste it.”<sup>27</sup> demonstrating that despite its growing popularity both in and outside the Dutch Surinamese community, Surinamese cuisine still is neglected and in some cases denigrated in the Netherlands.

## From Confusion to Pomfusion

Their unique context and history provide Surinamese citizens, as individuals and as members of various ethnic groups, with a sense of identity and continuity through which respect for cultural diversity and human creativity can be promoted (Stam 2008). According to Dineke Stam of Intercultural Museum and Heritage Projects (IMHP) in Amsterdam, with the exception of performing arts, pom fits the remaining four domains of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage:<sup>28</sup> (1) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (2) performing arts; (3) social practices, rituals, and festive events; (4) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and (5) traditional craftsmanship. UNESCO defines intangible cultural heritage as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated herewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (UNESCO 2003:2). Stam (2008) argues that because the dish migrated to the Netherlands, pom should be acknowledged as a transnational intangible cultural heritage.

Zilkia Janer (2007) argues that all cuisines have their own rules, techniques, and epistemology, and should be respected as a vivid part of living contemporary cultures. Pom can be considered as a hybrid of several Surinamese food cultures. Even before it first appeared as an ingredient in recipes, pom was already part of Suriname's transnational intangible cultural heritage.

The Surinamese nation and identity are still in development (Hoeft 1998). In Suriname, the mixing of several cultures resulted in a new national culture, from which a culinary culture emerged. Pom, an example of a *mélange* dish, is nowadays typified as authentically Surinamese. Pom recipes are still primarily transmitted orally and adapted from generation to generation. Within the Surinamese community, cooking pom remains a ritual requiring particular craftsmanship and knowledge about cultural practices, preparation, and ingredients (such as the indigenous *pomtajer*). Ferguson (2004:183) writes, “Eating is a question of conviviality—a bringing together.” The transnational migration of pom to the Netherlands unites the Surinamese community, but due to Suriname's history, it also sets the Surinamese individual, community, and ethnic groups apart from one another and from the surrounding cultures. The focus group conversations show that “talking pom” evokes an array of reactions. Overall, the

exchange of recipes, ingredients, methods, meaning, and memories elicit pleasant conversation, but once the question of pom ownership enters into the conversation, fierce debates can result.<sup>29</sup> Both Afro-Surinamese (descendants of former slaves) and Surinamese Jews (descendants of masters) claim ownership of pom. Nowadays, claiming pom ownership is a vehicle for the formerly subordinated to finally have the value and knowledge of past slave generations noticed and acknowledged. In Suriname, Europeans and Jews acted and felt themselves to be superior to the African-origin population, and national relationships thus were strongly influenced by racism and colonialism. The ongoing argument about pom ownership also shows how a shared past in the diaspora is capable of affecting and influencing present relationships.

Our foodways are rooted in and inspired by the cultures we come from. The food we eat is never static but always dynamic; thus foodways, food culture, and culinary identity can be considered works in progress. In *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine*, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (2004) describes the cultural process behind the transformation of the food of France into French cuisine, and how fine food, a privileged vehicle, became an important marker of contemporary French national identity. She also observes, “We cannot share the food we actually eat, but food as a subject and scene creates a collective experience that we can and indeed must share” (3). The proliferation of publications about French cuisine supports the idea that Western societies feel that they “must share” their culinary identities in writing. As a component of Suriname’s ethnic food culture—in which cooking skills, recipes, and foodways have largely been transmitted via a deep-rooted oral system of local and national traditions rather than in written form—pom exemplifies how a recipe for a festive dish and the accompanying culinary knowledge can also be transmitted orally from generation to generation and with great pride.

Some contemporary critics would suggest that culinary identity exists only if a culture produces dishes that can be labeled haute cuisine; at the same time there may be attempts to reimagine certain foods and dishes as national haute cuisine (see, for example, Stanford, this volume; Markowitz, this volume). Yet, most cooking takes place at home. Regardless of the proclaimed qualities of a cuisine, it is not produced by culinary professionals. The formation of culinary identity takes place primarily at home, in the domestic kitchen, rather than in gastronomic circles. Consequently, the greater the role that a dish such as pom has in a community, the more important it becomes as an identity marker. Tuomainen (2009) states that

an examination of the relationship between migration and ethnic identities formed through the (post) colonial experience is still a neglected area of research. Further examination and research into Surinamese culinary culture is necessary to provide insights regarding the past and present impacts and influences of food on Surinamese culture and identity.

Pom is served at almost every birthday, celebration, and social event in the Surinamese community, and is an important dish to all Surinamese (figure 5.3). Pom gives ethnic Surinamese in the Netherlands a sense of community belonging. Furthermore, they are always happy to share the dish with outsiders. Hospitality and sharing food with people who do not belong to the Surinamese community remain intrinsic parts of Surinamese identity.

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*Figure 5.3.* Irene Dongen serves pom on her birthday (February 9, 1959). (Used with permission of Historisch Beeldarchief Migranten, IISG, [www.iisg.nl/hbm](http://www.iisg.nl/hbm), Amsterdam, the Netherlands)

## Notes

1. The lyrics continue, “Oh, Netherlands, give me rice with yard-long string beans. Borecole with smoked sausage is delicious; it is what we eat in the Netherlands, but in Suriname we eat rice with yard-long string beans. Borecole is delicious but only in winter land, and what else can we eat in the cold Netherlands.” My translation from the Dutch: “O Nederland geef me rijst met kousenband. Boerenkool met rookworst is heerlijk en eten wij in Nederland maar in Suriname rijst met kousenband. Boerenkool is heerlijk maar alleen in winterland, wat moeten we anders eten in dit koude kikkerland.” This popular 1960s pop song reflects the longing for typical Surinamese food, and as borecole with smoked sausage is a typical Dutch hodgepodge, it also reveals something about the Surinamese attitude towards Dutch food.

2. Because the Indonesian immigrants were Dutch citizens, they were referred to as *repatriates*.

3. Between 1873 and 1939 more than 34,000 Indians and almost 33,000 Javanese immigrants arrived (Hoefte 1998:61–62).

4. According to the CIA World Fact Book, the estimated July 2008 population of Suriname was 475,996 people. [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ns.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ns.html) (accessed June 25, 2008).

5. According to Hoefte (1998), Suriname’s diverse society is reflected in the country’s political system. Political parties mostly are organized along ethnic rather than ideological lines.

6. Literally translated from the Dutch word *neger*. Hermans is very precise in his choice of words, as at the end of the sentence he uses the word *creole*. (Hermans is widely known to be a very precise author.)

7. My translation from the Dutch: “Suriname is eene donkere bladzijde in de geschiedenis van Nederland en vernedert en onteert het tegenwoordige geslacht, omdat het de schandelijke erfenis zijner vaderen, de gevloekte slavernij, niet opheft en vernietigt.”

8. The original Dutch from Van Hoëvell (1854:106–7) reads, “Het eenige voedsel, hetwelk aan den slaaf . . . verstrekt wordt, wanneer namelijk de meester goed vindt . . . bestaat in bananen met bakkeljaauw.” (The only food that a slave receives, if the master consents . . . is bananas and dried salted cod.)

9. *Tomtom* is the Surinamese word for *fufu*, *foofoo*, or *foufou*; a staple food in West Africa consisting of starchy roots and tubers boiled in water and pounded into a porridge or pudding.

10. My translation from the Dutch: “De groote tajer, waarvan de stengel half boven den grond groeit, wordt geraspt en met het sap van zure oranjes behandeld, daarna met kip of visch tot een pastei gemaakt, welk gerecht bekend staat als ‘pom.’”

11. John de Bye (Paramaribo 1942) is a Surinamese medical doctor and author. *Ter dood veroordeeld* takes place in the eighteenth century and describes the life of a Jewish plantation family and the Jewish community.

12. Wieke Vink, personal communication, May 2007. My translation from Dutch.

13. While Lufo ([www.lufo.nl](http://www.lufo.nl)) is the most popular brand, some five Surinamese companies export frozen and grated pomtajer into the Netherlands.

14. Benito Bourne, comment during focus group discussion, Amsterdam, March 8–22, 2007.

15. Natascha Adama, *ibid*.

16. Lyanda Augustzoon, *ibid.*
17. Juliette Emanuels, *ibid.*
18. Albert Heijn supermarkets distribute 2.1 million free copies of this publication monthly.
19. Surinamese *zuurgoed* (pickles) are typically made from cucumber and red onion (Vaneker, Ouddeken, and Slaats 2008).
20. My translation from Dutch.
21. Beuk's cooking style is best described as fusion. He frequently uses Surinamese culinary traditions and Asian ingredients and cooking styles.
22. A July 13, 2009, Google search for "broodje pom" in Dutch resulted in about 10,700 hits.
23. At present there are around 70,000 Surinamese in Amsterdam.
24. Participants brought friends and family to the focus groups; most did not want to participate officially, although they did contribute to the conversations, so the exact number of participants remains unclear.
25. My translation from Dutch.
26. In Senegal pomtajer is known as cocoyam and is used for fufu (see also fn. 9).
27. The rap was composed especially for the Imagine IC exhibition. The translation from Dutch is mine.
28. Stam, a historian, was the project manager of the 2007 Pom op het Menu exhibition at Imagine IC Amsterdam. At present she directs Intercultural Museum Heritage Projects (for more information see [www.cultuureenco.nl](http://www.cultuureenco.nl)).
29. During the preparations for the Pom op het Menu exhibition, an intern posted a Dutch pom entry and photograph on Wikipedia (see [http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pom\\_\(gerecht\)](http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pom_(gerecht))). The history of the entry reflects the ongoing discourse and discussion not only about pom's origins, but also about its meaning within the community (see [http://nl.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Pom\\_\(gerecht\)&action=history](http://nl.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Pom_(gerecht)&action=history)) (accessed December 17, 2010, and January 11, 2011).

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## *Redefining and Re-presenting Minor Millets in South India*

Elizabeth Finnis

When agricultural priorities and technologies change, historically important crops can become marginalized in the foodscape. Such processes can contribute to a loss of agricultural biodiversity as well as changes to local dietary and culinary practices. After India embraced Green Revolution crops and technologies, beginning in the mid-1960s, the total area of land devoted to coarse grains, including minor millets, began to decrease (Suryanarayana 1997). This trend, later coupled with an increased focus on specialized cash crops, meant that by 2000, only 15.76 percent of the total cultivated area in India supported coarse grains; this is compared to 29.45 percent of the total cultivated area in the 1960s (MSSRF 2004a:29). However, the precise local-level reasons for decreases in minor millet cultivation, along with the outcomes of these decreases, differ from place to place, as do strategies for encouraging the cultivation of millets today.

In this chapter, I examine two minor millet varieties, analyzing the ways that *samai* (*Panicum sumatrense*) and *thenai* (*Setaria italica*) millets are being reimagined and repackaged for urban consumers. I demonstrate how refocusing attention onto different relevant features can change the social meanings, or regimes of value (Appadurai 1986), ascribed to these food crops. This allows for a consideration of the contested meanings surrounding the criteria that are used to determine the exchangeability (Lind and Barham 2004:48) of millets. The move to reimagine and then market millets to an urban consumer base reflects emerging and ongoing concerns about Indian agricultural biodiversity, and plays on themes of cultural heritage, authenticity, and health. How does this attempt to present

millet as desirable grains intersect with the perspectives of the farmers who have traditionally grown and relied upon these grains as dietary staples? By merging a discussion of a millet cookbook and millet packaging with ethnographic research among Kolli Hills Malayali communities, I reveal symbolic tensions and intersections between millet promotional strategies and the perceptions of Malayali farmers.

Food can be a site of contestation regarding historical and contemporary processes of the globalization of agricultural and culinary practices and the creation of national and local identities (Bordi 2006; Leitch 2003; Lind and Barham 2004; McDonald and Topik 2008; Meneley 2004; Grasseni, this volume; Stanford, this volume). In undertaking an analysis of local-level perceptions of specific crops, notions of agricultural and culinary resilience can also be examined. Resilience can be defined in a number of ways, ranging from notions of ecosystem diversity and integrity to the preservation of cultural practices in quickly changing circumstances. In the final part of this chapter, I consider resilience and food in terms of a global pool of agricultural biodiversity and culinary diversity, and also from local perspectives. A simultaneous consideration of these two levels can demonstrate similarities, tensions, and disjunctures between projects to promote certain foods as authentic, and the experiences and perspectives of the people who have traditionally cultivated and consumed those foods.

### **The Kolli Hills: Shifting Agricultural and Economic Practices**

The ethnographic data in this chapter emerge from work with Malayali communities in the Kolli Hills, Tamil Nadu, India. Since 2003, I have worked in three adjacent villages, tracking changes in agricultural and dietary practices and patterns.<sup>1</sup> The Kolli Hills cover approximately 282 square kilometers, and support a population of about 37,000, primarily Malayali farmers. Although the Kolli Hills are not precisely isolated, their height, rising between 1,000 and 1,400 meters above sea level, coupled with limited road access means that inhabitants can face obstacles when traveling within the hills and to lowland communities. The hills can be considered geographically marginal, particularly areas farther from the hill administrative center. The inhabitants, as a scheduled tribe, are in some ways culturally marginal, at risk of being stigmatized and overlooked politically.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the inhabitants of the Kolli Hills are generally considered economically marginal due to limited available livelihood options.

Most Malaiyali are primarily small-scale farmers. In the last twenty to thirty years, as roads into and throughout the hills have been improved and extended, there has been an accompanying shift from subsistence to commercial agriculture, raising concerns about food security, agricultural and natural biodiversity, and changes to local cultural practices (Arunachalam, Rengalakshmi, and Kubera Raj 2005; Bohle 1992; Kumaran et al. 1998; Kumar-Range 2001; Rengalakshmi et al. 2002). However, the degrees to which commercial crops play roles in local economies, as well as crop preferences and profit/debt cycles, vary among the fourteen administrative units (*nadus*) and more than 240 communities in the hills.

I work in one *nadu*, Thakkali Nadu.<sup>3</sup> Although there are a few notable exceptions, households in this area typically own and cultivate less than five acres of land. Thakkali Nadu is one of the more geographically marginal regions in the hills, located a several-hour bus ride from the central hills.<sup>4</sup> The area consists of seven villages and fewer than two thousand inhabitants. Aside from agriculture, there are few in the way of livelihood options. Some households receive remittances from children or husbands working outside of the hills; others have secondary income-generation strategies that cater to local needs, including tailoring or operating small shops.

While minor millets were traditionally the main cultivars, more recently farmers have moved towards cultivating the cash crop sweet cassava (*Manihot esculenta*) for their economic livelihoods. In Thakkali Nadu, cassava dominates dryland fields, and in some cases it is the only crop households cultivate. This tuber is rarely locally consumed. Rather, it is sold to sago-starch factories in the lowlands surrounding the hills for use as a food thickener and in the textile industry. Even with fluctuations in market prices and annual yields, the regular income from cassava has allowed farmers to engage in new forms of consumer activities (Finnis 2006). Farmers use their cassava income for a variety of purposes, including obtaining higher levels of education for their children; making home improvements and new houses; purchasing goods such as clothes, kitchen supplies, and electronic goods; and contributing to some community projects. The income that sweet cassava brings is unprecedented in the area, and the outcomes of this wealth are readily visible in consumption changes, some of which occurred relatively rapidly. For example, by late 2006, several households owned cell phones; this is in stark contrast to 2003 and 2004, when there were no phones in the area, landline or otherwise. There is, however, some economic differentiation within and between villages. This differentiation is most often indicated by relatively

small differences in quality and quantity of landownership and access to commercial goods. For example, although many households have purchased televisions, have tile instead of thatch roofs, and may send their children to school for more years, a handful of participant households are more economically marginal and may rent land to farm, or work solely as day laborers on other people's land.

When asked about reasons for the shift to cassava cultivation, Thakkali Nadu farmers invariably cite environmental and economic issues. The two points are likely to be discussed interchangeably. Thus, in interviews, some farmers raise economic concerns first, then follow up with a discussion of changes in rainfall patterns; others begin with an outline of environmental concerns and segue into discussing the need for a cash income. Farmers argue that relatively recent changes in rainfall patterns make it difficult to grow minor millets. Sweet cassava can grow in these conditions, even though yields would be higher if rains were better during the growing season. An additional factor in the rise of cassava cultivation in Thakkali Nadu is completion of a paved road to the area approximately twenty years ago. Such infrastructure is key to cassava cultivation, since the heavy tubers must be transported to markets by truck. In contrast to the limited cash crops, such as groundnuts, that were once grown in the area, farmers are unable to carry their cassava harvests down to the lowlands on foot.

The focus on sweet cassava cultivation has implications for ecosystem complexity, cultural practices, and diet. Monocultures necessarily mean a decrease in local agricultural biodiversity, and there are issues with cassava sustainability. Sweet cassava is known to rapidly deplete the soil of nutrients, and farmers increasingly rely on more chemical fertilizers each year. Additionally, during one field stay, I noticed several fields with plants sporting wilted, malformed leaves. On inquiring about this, I was told that farmers were worried about "some kind of fungus" that had developed and was spreading through the densely planted and adjoining fields. There are other implications of this cassava dependence beyond crop risk and soil depletion. Grazing lands for herd animals have been reduced, as cassava has spread to land that was previously considered "wasteland" only good for grazing animals. At the same time, most farmers argue that recent attempts to grow minor millets have been unsuccessful, providing little more than fodder for animals and leaving the land a "wasted" space for that year.

In terms of food, the replacement of minor millet fields with sweet cassava fields means a decrease in dietary grain diversity. The shift from growing millets for consumption to cultivating cassava for sale has changed dietary patterns. Rice has replaced millet varieties as the staple grain.

Almost all Thakkali Nadu households grow some of their rice in local wetland fields, but this cultivation cannot meet annual needs. Rice purchased through the government Public Distribution System shops, or from private stores, is therefore also crucial to household diets.

Discussions of the social, health, and work-related implications of millets, of rice as a food, and of cassava as a crop inevitably emerged from most discussions with Thakkali Nadu farmers about their agricultural practices and transitions. Millets have specific local social and dietary meanings; this chapter considers issues of millets, diet, and preference by considering how local perceptions of millets intersect with and contrast to the ways two varieties, samai and thenai, are discussed by a marketing venture based elsewhere in the Kolli Hills. This venture, run under the Hill Resource Development Association self-help group, focuses on encouraging a return to millet cultivation by developing new markets for the grains. The project, organized by the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), works with farmers in some communities to grow millets for sale to urban, lowland Indian consumers. The initiative includes strategic marketing that highlights specific themes through promotional literature and the creation of a cookbook with recipes for samai and thenai. I now turn to an analysis of the ways that these minor millets, the Kolli Hills, and Malaiyali farmers are presented in this literature.

### **Minor Millets: An Authentic Taste for the Healthy, Ethical Gourmet?**

Appadurai's (1988) analysis of Indian cookbooks argues that they contribute to new consumption styles among an emerging Indian middle class, particularly in smaller urban centers. Cookbooks can merge idealized, edited, and selective presentations of regional cuisines with nationalist, integrationist ideologies and notions of Indian culinary authenticity. If some Indian cookbooks can participate in a nation-building process that "civilizes" diverse national cuisines (Appadurai 1988), what does a cookbook with recipes for coarse grains from the Kolli Hills do in the presentation of these grains?

I purchased my cookbook, along with some packaged thenai, at a kiosk located outside a grocery store in a lowland town approximately one hour from the base of the Kolli Hills, and a minimum five-hour bus ride from Thakkali Nadu. Individuals at the kiosk sold packages of millets and the cookbook, and distributed informational flyers. The cookbook,

*Mouthwatering Gourmets from Traditional Foods of Kolli Hills* (MSSRF 2004b), is available in English or Tamil, and presents forty-seven recipes for samai and thenai.<sup>5</sup> The cover features pictures of prepared dishes juxtaposed against images of various millet stalks. Recipes include standard information about ingredient measurements and preparation methods, as well as approximate preparation times. Some recipes also provide additional information about taste, preparation, and health benefits. For example, the recipe for Samai Adai, a crepelike dish, is prefaced with a statement about the dish's high protein content and advice that it can be eaten at least twice a week; meanwhile, Samai Kara Pongal is described as a “delicious spicy [samai] rice preparation . . . [and] an instant source of energy and proteins” (MSSRF 2004b:21). Aside from millet grains or flour, the ingredients listed are readily found in south Indian kitchens, and include curry leaves, chiles, lentils, and spices such as fenugreek and cumin. Measurements are a mix of non-metric amounts, such as teaspoons and tablespoons, and measurements familiar to Indian kitchens, such as four tumblers (a small drinking vessel) of thenai to one tumbler of black gram dal (to make Thenai Dosai).

The recipes are preceded by a series of preliminary materials that provides basic information about the Kolli Hills and Malaiyali agricultural and culinary practices, offering an ethnic cameo snapshot (Appadurai 1988:16) of Malaiyali farmers from a hillside region. Some basic information about millet nutritional characteristics is also provided. An analysis of these introductory materials demonstrates how the cookbook positions the consumption of millets in terms of health, cultural heritage, and agricultural biodiversity, making the argument that samai and thenai are dietary choices for the health-conscious and socially responsible Indian citizen.

Aside from providing such snapshots and nutritional information, these preliminary materials simultaneously do several things. First, they problematize the national (Phillips 2006) by implicitly and explicitly pointing to problematic national agricultural and dietary trends. The cookbook explicitly addresses dietary and nutritional trends, appealing to the health-conscious consumer by positioning millets as a healthy alternative to rice. In doing so, it makes a connection between healthy environments and healthy foods. This position is foreshadowed by the information on the package of millets, which declares thenai to be a “healthy supplementary food” rich in vitamins and minerals like iron and folic acid. If consumers decide to purchase the cookbook, they are provided with more detailed nutritional information that focuses on the inherent qualities of millets. The nutritive values of thenai, samai, other millets, rice, and wheat are

presented in three tables based on data from the 1996 edition of Gopalan, Rama Sastri, and Balasubramanian's authoritative and comprehensive *Nutritive Value of Indian Foods* (see table 6.1 for selected nutritional values from the 2004 edition of this volume). The detailed information in these charts is followed up and reinforced by a brief breakdown of some key points: samai is rich in fiber, iron, zinc, and copper, while thenai is particularly rich in thiamine and niacin.

The prevalence of diabetes in urban India is also invoked, reflecting increasing publicity and policy initiatives in the last few years (Kleinfeld 2006).<sup>6</sup> Thenai, for example, is described as a healthy alternative for diabetics. Pregnant and lactating women, as well as those with anemia, high cholesterol, or heart disease are said to benefit from the inclusion of millets in the diet. Although rice and millets are never explicitly contrasted, the fact that recipes sometimes substitute millets for rice implies that a direct comparison is being made between the two grains, with millets being demonstrated as inherently healthier.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond being presented as more nutritive than rice, samai and thenai are also conceptualized as healthy due to the environment in which they are produced. The millet material explicitly and implicitly draws on key words and attitudes about hill environments and tribal farming practices. The millet packaging states that the grains are produced in an "organic environment" without "additives and preservatives." Invoking an organic environment is aided by the ways the Kolli Hills and the Malaiyali are positioned in the cookbook preliminary material. Malaiyali farmers are described as "primarily subsistence agriculturalists" (MSSRF 2004b: preface) who once relied on a range of millet landraces (that is, local varieties of a given species that reflect local environmental adaptations). By drawing on images of a scheduled tribe living in an isolated hill area, the cookbook deftly intersects with popular images of tribal populations as living in pristine, resource-rich areas (Majumdar 2000) that have typically been bypassed by high-tech agricultural practices (Bhowmick 2000; Das 2000; Vidyarthi 2000) such as high-yield rice varieties, mechanization, and the use of agrochemicals. While in some cases, low-tech agricultural practices might be seen as negative and "backwards" (Yoganandam 2001), in this case, an association with low tech enhances claims of chemical-free, organic cultivation contexts. Millets, as grains overlooked by Green Revolution technologies, become positioned as untouched by potentially dangerous agricultural chemicals; coupled with the positioning of the Kolli Hills as a traditional reservoir of agricultural biodiversity, this helps to associate the Malaiyali, the Kolli Hills, and millets with idealized notions of nature and healthy environments.

**Table 6.1** Nutritive values in selected grains (per 100 edible grams)

<i>Grain</i>	<i>Energy (kcal)</i>	<i>Carbohydrate (g)</i>	<i>Protein (g)</i>	<i>Calcium (mg)</i>	<i>Iron (g)</i>	<i>Folic Acid (mg)</i>	<i>Niacin (mg)</i>	<i>Thiamine (mg)</i>
Samai ( <i>Panicum sumatrense</i> )	341	67.0	7.7	17	9.3	9.0	3.2	0.30
Thenai ( <i>Setaria italica</i> )	331	60.9	12.3	31	2.8	15.0	3.2	0.59
Varagu ( <i>Paspalum scrobiculatum</i> )	309	65.9	8.3	27	0.5	23.1	2.0	0.33
Milled rice	345	78.2	6.8	10	0.7	11.0	3.8	0.21
Wheat	346	71.2	11.8	41	5.3	36.6	5.5	0.45

*Source:* Gopalan, Rama Sastri, and Balasubramanian 2004.

Invoking notions of pre–Green Revolution ways of farming also draws on overlapping themes of cultural heritage, authenticity, and biodiversity, making an appeal to a consumer who is socially and environmentally aware. That is, the cookbook addresses some agricultural problematics associated with Green Revolution technologies and decreased grain biodiversity. Samai and thenai cultivation is discussed in terms of traditions that allow for the conservation of varieties and landraces, and the reader is told that the Malaiyali have, over a long period, used and conserved “eight landraces of little millets (locally known as samai), seven landraces of fox-tail millets (locally known as thenai), four landraces of Kodo millets (locally known as varagu) and four landraces of finger millets (locally known as ragi)” (MSSRF 2004b: preface). Pulses, oilseeds, and vegetables are also mentioned as part of the traditional subsistence foods that the Kolli Hills Malaiyali once relied upon. In contrast, the current situation is described as one where various cash crops, including sweet cassava, coffee, pepper, and pineapple, have made increasing inroads into the hills, leading to a decline in agricultural biodiversity and in the cultivation of food crops; this text condenses and makes accessible the concerns and conclusions of academics who, since the early 1990s, have examined the problematic outcomes of shifting agricultural, economic, dietary, and environmental situations in the Kolli Hills (see, for example, Bohle 1992; Kumaran et al. 1998; Rengalakshmi et al. 2002).

Consuming millets and supporting their cultivation therefore becomes about maintaining not just individual health, but also healthy agricultural environments that are rooted in biodiversity. In making this argument, the cookbook provides a local, concrete example of some of the problematic national and global agricultural trends that include the advancement of commercial crops into peripheral areas to the detriment of local crops and local livelihoods, the increasing spread of agricultural monocultures, and the implications these changes have for biodiversity, food security, culinary practices, and cultural heritage (Rengalakshmi et al. 2002; Shiva 2004; see also Kedia 2004).

In highlighting all of these points, the preliminary materials accomplish a second important aspect—they exoticize millets to a degree, via a clear demonstration that they are not common in urban environments. In doing so, they help negotiate this exoticism (Long 2004). By discussing millet recipes as part of a body of “dietary traditions of tribal and rural families” (MSSRF 2004b: foreword), the cookbook privileges elements of nostalgia that exoticize images of a pristine past. Millets are exotic both in terms of their connections to this past and because they are distinctly different from what the urban

consumer buys at grocery stores and other food shops. The cookbook draws on notions of a distinct and rich set of culinary practices that are in danger of disappearing as agricultural biodiversity is lost. Value is placed on the practice of tribal, “ethnic” agricultural food traditions versus the expansion of nontraditional, commercial crops and dietary homogenization.

Third, the cookbook engages with notions of authenticity; this discourse balances notions of exoticism with ideas of Indian cultural heritage. Although the term *authentic* is never used, millets are constructed as an authentic Indian food, rooted in historic agricultural practices. The fact that millets have not been part of Green Revolution technologies distances them from such aspects of modernity. Bendix (1997:7) has argued that notions of authenticity engage with ideas of morality, and in this case, the consumption of millets is positioned as moral in environmental and heritage-protection terms. This is part of creating a “market of identifiable authenticities” (Bendix 1997:2). Notions of authenticity are reinforced by the statement that the recipes were collected by working with women’s self-help groups in the Kolli Hills; thus, the cookbook assures the consumer of the authenticity of the “ethnic food culture” recipes (MSSRF 2004b: preface). On the back cover, photographs depicting women preparing and serving dishes in festive, engaging contexts reinforce written assurances of authenticity.

In highlighting the knowledge of Kolli Hills women, the cookbook also makes connections among gender, food, and the enacting of cultural memory. As Holtzman (2006) has pointed out, the sharing of food heritage may be understood as a “gift” from mothers to daughters, ensuring notions of identity and the enacting of that identity across generations, while also building intergenerational relationships. The Kolli Hills cookbook, by explicitly discussing the participation of women’s self-help groups in the creation of the cookbook, similarly presents a sharing of specific ideas of authenticity and Indian cultural heritage, but not across generations. Rather, this is a (marketable) gift across social and geographical spaces; it is a gift that builds symbolic relationships between the highland, tribal, farming women struggling to maintain culinary and agricultural traditions, and lowland, nontribal, urban women who may be interested in contributing to nascent movements to preserve cultural and agricultural heritage. Thus, the cookbook can be understood as engaging with elements of culinary tourism. Long (2004:21) has defined culinary tourism as “the intentional, exploratory participation in the foodways of an other—participation including the consumption, preparation and presentation of a food item, cuisine, meal system or eating style considered to belong to a culinary

system not one's own." This is what the cookbook is inviting urban, lowland consumers to do. Long (2004) has argued that culinary otherness can be evoked via numerous factors, including region and culture. The cookbook highlights otherness by drawing on images of tribal people and hill agricultural environments as distinct from lowland agricultural and urban environments. At the same time, these markers of otherness are still positioned as uniquely Indian. Thus, the cookbook simultaneously evokes ideas of culinary difference and culinary locality.

In making these arguments about millets, the cookbook consciously highlights specific positive and ethical criteria for the exchangeability (Lind and Barham 2004) of minor millets from the Kolli Hills. Millets are presented as having important potential for helping India to strengthen national and household-level food security by providing a more diverse and nutritionally useful basic food basket to its citizens, particularly its urban citizens who may be removed from the food crops that tribal populations have traditionally cultivated for their "agro-ecological, culinary and nutrition characteristics" (MSSRF 2004b: foreword).

In the process, the Kolli Hills and the consumption of millets are constructed as reservoirs. The hills are presented as an at-risk reservoir of threatened agricultural biodiversity. The consumption of minor millets, in turn, is presented as an at-risk reservoir of Indian tradition and culinary heritage, something that has been overshadowed by post-Green Revolution crops and commercial agriculture, which have triggered decreases of agro-biodiversity through the diffusion of high-yield crops into areas once known for crop diversity (Rengalakshmi et al. 2002). Value is also placed on an aesthetic of the rural (Miele and Murdoch 2002:312) by highlighting traditional agricultural and culinary practices of a hill-dwelling, comparatively isolated, rural population that is presented as typifying endangered rural livelihoods. Such an approach, bolstering a political position that draws attention to the growing concerns over agricultural heritage and decrease in biodiversity in the hills (Arunachalam, Rengalakshmi, and Kuberaj 2005; Chittibabu and Parthasarathy 2000; Kumaran et al. 1998; Rengalakshmi et al. 2002), strategically places Kolli Hills millets, and coarse grains in general, as endangered agricultural products.

## **Developing a Niche Market**

Although it does not explicitly connect itself to the Slow Food movement, the cookbook intersects with some central Slow Food perspectives:

nostalgia for food traditions; a desire to increase agricultural and culinary knowledge; and the development of discriminating, elite, authentic tastes in order to help combat global dietary homogenization (Meneley 2004). Thenai and samai are in this way linked with increasing global concerns about and activism regarding endangered plants, crop varieties, and foods, as well as decreasing culinary diversity (Bordi 2006; Leitch 2003; Stille 2001). One of the ways the Slow Food movement and organization have responded to these processes has been the creation of the Ark of Taste, which “aims to rediscover, catalogue, describe and publicize forgotten flavors” (Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity n.d.), something that is also taking place in the millet-marketing project through the creation of the cookbook. Indeed, the millet cookbook hopes to “reach [a] wide audience of housewives to popularise the gourmets from millets” (MSSRF 2004b: preface). In doing so, and in highlighting biodiversity and sustainability, the project draws on ideas similar to Slow Food’s eco-gastronomy, specifically tailored to an Indian audience through the use of particularly Indian foods and imagery.<sup>8</sup>

Since the cookbook hopes to reach a wide audience of housewives, it is worth examining who those housewives might be. While they may be women who are already concerned about health, biodiversity, rural livelihoods, or the overshadowing of traditional foodscapes by crop commercialization and the globalization of food, it is also possible that by cooking with Kollu Hills millets, they will *become* engaged with these issues. However, they are all almost certainly educated, urban women who can read Tamil and also likely read English at least well enough to read the millet packaging and possibly also purchase the English edition of the cookbook. The use of English on packaging and in the cookbook makes recipes accessible to urban consumers who do not read Tamil. Yet English is a commodity language. Thakkali Nadu farmers, for example, consider government-run, Tamil-language schools to be inadequate for developing fluency in English because English is only taught as one subject. If possible, families send their children to English-language schools, but these schools are private and have high tuition fees. The ability to read, write, and speak fluent English is therefore something that is most accessible to middle-class or upper-income households, which Thakkali Nadu farmers firmly place in urban locales where there are more ways to make money. English-language schools are beyond the financial means of most farmer households in Thakkali Nadu. Indeed, many adult farmers in the area are not proficient in written Tamil, having had limited educational backgrounds.

By providing background and contextualizing information about the Kolli Hills and its Malaiyali inhabitants, the cookbook reinforces that the intended audience is not a woman from a Malaiyali farming household. Rather, the cookbook is educating the interested outside reader. Finally, the cookbook draws on the notion of the gourmand-consumer, someone who has a discriminating palate and the time to savor local, diverse food crops and culinary histories. In doing so, it suggests that potential consumers may see themselves as interested in expanding their culinary repertoires, while also experiencing the side benefits of good nutrition and the cachet of socially responsible eating. This is, incidentally, also a consumer who can afford a cookbook for Rs. 30, which is close to what a Malaiyali woman would expect to earn for a day's labor in a neighbor's agricultural field.

In arguing that agricultural biodiversity in the Kolli Hills is inseparable from the agricultural practices, priorities, and knowledge (Shepherd 2005) of Malaiyali farmers, the cookbook positions the situation in the Kolli Hills as a microcosm for agricultural trends in India in general. Consequently, eating millets becomes about more than individual health or Kolli Hills biodiversity and livelihoods. It becomes part of the decision to draw on an Indian tradition. This marketing strategy is a savvy mix of presenting ethical arguments for food choices that are embedded in specific cultural and environmental contexts (Miele and Murdoch 2002),<sup>9</sup> along with arguments that appeal to notions of status, refinement, and class. In the process, minor millets, as coarse grains that have been overshadowed by rice and wheat in Indian agricultural fields and on Indian tables, become "civilized" (Appadurai 1988) and suited to urban tastes.

### **Minor Millets in Thakkali Nadu: Poverty, Health, and Flavor**

If the marketing project presents millets to lowland, urban consumers as healthy, ethical, and gourmet dietary choices, how then do farmers who once relied on millets as dietary staples think about them today? Recently, Phillips (2006) has noted that further studies into the transformation of consumption practices in farmer households will help illustrate the complexities of globalization. An analysis of Thakkali Nadu households demonstrates the transformation of consumption practices and preferences, dietary and otherwise, offering insight into shifting meanings and representations of foods at a local level, part of a broader series of shifting global food practices.

Farmers in Thakkali Nadu are not part of the millet cultivation and marketing project. Millet varieties are rarely grown in the area, and when they are cultivated, it is for household use. Millets are nevertheless frequently raised in discussions of agriculture, food, and economics, going hand in hand with complex and sometimes contradictory social meanings. These social meanings can depend on the attitudes of the individual, and may also shift in relation to context. Thus, what an elderly woman thinks and says about the entirety of millet cultivation, preparation, and consumption while eating a plate of rice is not necessarily what her granddaughter will feel while cooking that rice. However, as traditional food crops that once played a key role in local subsistence strategies, millets as a topic have the potential to lead to discussions of identity and status, as well as perceptions of health. It is these associations that I explore in this section.

While millets may be a topic of discussion, the reality is that they are rarely physically present. While there is some variation in attitudes towards millets, one constant is that they are rarely available.<sup>10</sup> I have observed thenai or *ragi* being prepared or consumed on only a handful of occasions, sometimes accompanied by statements that the grains had been saved from previous years, before the household gave up on trying to get a decent harvest. It is also telling that I was only able to try thenai after I bought a package in a lowland town. More importantly, semi-structured interviews, dietary recalls, food-larder focus groups, and participant-observation in kitchens and fields all revealed that millets are a minimal part of the current agricultural, dietary, and culinary practices of participant households. For example, my research assistant and I conducted food focus groups with groups of women in three communities in Thakkali Nadu, in which we asked the women to collaboratively list foods available for consumption, then individually rank these foods in terms of frequency of consumption. This subjective measure of food availability provides a sense of how women think about household food baskets. Millets were included in the food lists in two communities. In one community, samai, thenai, *ragi* (*Eleusine coracana*), and varagu (*Paspalum scorobiculatum*) were listed; in the other community, only samai was listed as an available food. Despite their inclusion in lists, millets were ranked low in consumption, comparable only to meat, which is typically eaten for special occasions and festivals. Rice, in contrast, was consistently ranked as the most frequently consumed item, reflecting the reality that currently it is the central food in the diets of Thakkali Nadu households. Thus, if in the past, “hill people only ate millets like samai, thenai,” this is not the case today, and “for the past fifteen years, we have only been eating rice” (sixty-one-year-old man).

In contrast, farmers argue that in the past, rice was food for lowland, urban citizens. Comparing hillside lifestyles to perceptions of urban, lowland life plays a central role in the ways Thakkali Nadu villagers think about Malaiyali identity (Finnis 2010). While markers of identity in any cultural setting can be numerous, complex, and not necessarily internally consistent, millets were frequently described as a tribal food associated with tribal economic strategies.

Prior to the mid-1960s and the introduction of Green Revolution technologies, coarse grains played a role in the diets of lowlanders in Tamil Nadu (Suryanarayana 1997), something that a few research participants recognized. One man in his early seventies, for example, recalls that when he was young, lowlanders ate millets: “Those who are living down in Namakkal and Salem [lowland town and city], before, they were also eating the millets. In my thirties, twenties. Then their lifestyle totally changed and they began eating rice. . . . The difference [now] is, those who are here, if somehow they have millets, they still eat them. Those living down [i.e., in the lowlands], they don’t eat millets at all.”

Most farmers were more likely to describe rice as the quintessential lowlander food, and millets as a “tribal” food. In particular, minor millets were described as a tribal food in that tribal people ate them precisely because they *grew* them. Thus, one man in his late fifties said, “The people living down [in the lowlands] never eat millets. For one thing, we never took them down and sold them, so that people could buy and eat them.” A woman living in an adjacent village made a similar statement: “People who are down were not eating millets. One reason was that they were not getting it, because we were not able to take it down and sell it. So they were not eating it.” Another woman in her early thirties succinctly encapsulated these beliefs when she said, “I don’t think those people down [in the lowlands] were eating millets, not like us here.”

Such statements highlight that food practices are one way Thakkali Nadu villagers view difference and identity between Malaiyali hillside dwellers and lowland urban citizens. It should be pointed out that regardless of the role of coarse cereals in the lowlands prior to the Green Revolution, the variety of landraces among Kolli Hills millets is substantial (Rengalakshmi et al. 2002). Landraces, being locally adapted varieties, are important because they contribute to the overall genetic diversity of a species. Given that the environment of the hills differs from that of the surrounding lowlands, particularly in terms of temperature and rainfall patterns, farmers growing millets outside of the hills would have had access to different landraces than are in the Kolli Hills. Coupled with the

fact that Kolli Hills millets were reserved for household use, this means that even when lowlanders were also eating coarse grains they would not necessarily have been eating precisely the *same kinds* of millets.

The contrast between rice in the lowlands and millets in the hills also encompasses notions of poverty and development. Millet consumption is symbolically linked with a time when villagers relied primarily on subsistence agriculture for survival, and had limited opportunities to earn cash income. Consequently, what little money was available was reserved for household needs that could not be locally grown or produced. Because rice needed to be purchased, eating it symbolized a household's ability to spend money on nonessentials. It was a sign of economic prosperity. A mother in her late twenties said, "The people who had thenai, samai were considered poor in the past. . . . People who bought rice were considered rich then." This has lingering implications today, when those "who won't have money take samai and thenai. People won't think thenai and samai are high status. Rice is high status" (forty-five-year-old woman).

Rice therefore becomes a symbol of social mobility (Rengalakshmi et al. 2002) and status, as indicated by the same forty-five-year-old woman who said that those without money eat millets, and described rice as having a "richly" look. It is rice, not millets, that is considered suitable to feed guests and is important to serve during functions such as weddings and Pongal, the Tamil harvest festival. In turn, millet consumption and cultivation become linked with a state of underdevelopment, which participants sometimes also referred to as being "uncultured." As an agricultural strategy, growing millets might have provided diverse grains for household use, but was unable to provide cash incomes. Thus, prior to the cultivation of sweet cassava, villagers were unable to access what they consider some key signs of the process of economic development: electricity in the home, greater access to commercial goods, and broader understandings of the world outside of the hills. One thirty-seven-year-old farmer encapsulated these complex food-agriculture-development-identity relationships when he said, "Before, we were growing millets, samai, thenai, varagu. Now we have stopped growing them . . . the people living down were not eating millets. They started growing [sweet cassava] before us. They had the convenience of the road and vehicle facilities, and they were eating only rice. They were not growing or eating millets, they were already living a cultured and civilized life, not like here."

Infrastructure, access to services, income generation, and dietary practices are all linked here, with rice consumption becoming inevitably associated with processes of social change and integration with national road

and food system networks. As I have argued elsewhere (Finnis 2008), when millets become associated with economic poverty, underdevelopment, and behaviors and lifestyles that are perceived as unsophisticated, the grains themselves become understood as inherently inferior and disadvantageous crops. Yet, such low-status associations are not absolute. If millets in the past were associated with poverty and low status, today some villagers highlight other values. As millets disappear from the local foodscape and household foodways, there is an emerging change in the symbolic status of these grains that reflects health concerns and taste preferences. In particular, women and older men were more likely to argue that millets are in the process of becoming high-valued food crops in Thakkali Nadu.

For example, one fifty-seven-year-old man expressed concerns with physical strength and stamina, as linked to rice consumption. Government-ration-shop rice was particularly suspect. “When we were eating millets, we were healthy and strong, and not getting sick. Now we are only eating rice, and from the Society only. And there is no strength in the Society rice.”<sup>11</sup>

Concerns about relying on rice reflect perceptions of both the inherent properties of millets and the quality of purchased rice. In this way, Thakkali Nadu health perceptions echo those of the millet marketing project and the cookbook. Millets, for example, were described as imparting strength and preparing the body for a long day of hard work in agricultural fields; little millets do take longer to digest (Rengalakshmi et al. 2002), contributing to a prolonged feeling of fullness after a meal. As one woman in her late twenties stated, “In my youth, I ate samai, thenai. In the past, each day we had a variety of grains—samai, thenai, varagu, panivaragu. . . . In the past years, the old men drank thenai kanchi [thenai porridge] and the whole day they did work. They didn’t feel hungry. But nowadays, we eat rice, [and] we get hungry suddenly.”

Notions of strength are beginning to override notions of poverty: millets impart strength and stamina, whereas rice does not. As one woman from an economically marginal household said, “The people who had money before bought rice. Rice was considered high-quality food. Thenai and samai are now considered a high-quality food because it gives us more strength than rice.”

Moreover, rice is not “good food” in that it is suspect in other ways. Thakkali Nadu farmers have no control over the conditions in which their purchased rice is grown. While millets in the past may have been grown without the use of chemicals, farmers argue that this is not the case with rice, particularly ration-shop rice. Concerns about chemical fertilizers and pesticides in this rice come together with the reality that ration-shop rice

contains considerable grit and debris; the rice is described as “dirty,” in terms of both visible dirt and invisible and unknown contaminants. Ration-shop rice represents the new agricultural reality that farmers are no longer able to monitor how land is treated, and what inputs are used in growing the food they are eating. This loss of control echoes concerns about a loss of control in their own cassava fields, where farmers are increasingly reliant on purchasing chemical fertilizers to get a viable harvest. As they use more chemicals, farmers begin to question the health implications of using chemical fertilizers in their sweet cassava fields. Such concerns are manifest in terms of the juxtaposition of current notions of health with idealized beliefs about health in the past.

While younger women had limited, if any, memories of eating millets regularly, women in their late twenties and older lamented the loss of taste variety. For example, in a typical comment about the current reliance on rice, an elderly woman stated, “I don’t like rice, but there is no other choice, so I am eating it,” while a woman in her early thirties said, “[Samai and Thenai] are considered now as a high-quality food, because they give more strength and taste better than rice.” Tensions between the desire for millets to eat versus the desire for a cash income sometimes emerged between women and men in the same household, with women stating they would like to eat millets, but that their husbands preferred to grow cassava for the money.

The meanings ascribed to millets in Thakkali Nadu are part of a local shift in regimes of value (Appadurai 1986) regarding crops and foods, among other commodities. Perceived health properties, such as strength and fullness, are increasingly locally identified as the most relevant properties of these crops, outweighing other associations with a time of poverty and limited economic options. This shift in status appears to be occurring precisely because millets are now scarce, overshadowed by cassava in the fields and rice in the cook pot. That is, in contrast to the millet-marketing-project cookbook, which highlights the ways that access to millets can improve health and help maintain dietary and culinary traditions, the value being placed on millet varieties in Thakkali Nadu reflects the reality that these grains are rarely, if ever, locally available.

### **Final Thoughts: Implications for Notions of Resilience in Cuisine and Agro-Biodiversity**

What implications do processes of revisioning and relocating minor millets from the Kolli Hills have for practices of culinary resilience and agricultural

biodiversity?<sup>12</sup> In the process of marketing samai and thenai as contributors to healthy bodies and healthy agriculture, and as part of the authentic, rich culinary heritage of India, these grains are being located for sale in urban locales where Thakkali Nadu farmers typically do not go and do not shop. Moreover, millets are sold in five-hundred-gram packages, which is a very small amount when compared to the thirty-kilogram or more bags of rice that are found in Thakkali Nadu households. By being marketed in small, ready-to-cook amounts, thenai and samai take on some of the associations of a “boutique” food for people who wish to develop or further a taste for specialized foods. Similar shifts in the meanings of local foods once primarily consumed by economically and geographically marginal populations have been found in other contexts, including Leitch’s (2003) analysis of *lardo* (pork fat) and marble quarry communities in Italy, Pilcher’s (2004) discussion of the movement of corn fungus from a low-status food to haute cuisine in Mexico, and Bordini’s (2006) consideration of authenticity, nostalgia, and tacos made from colorful, indigenous maize varieties in urban Mexico. Such processes help create new symbols of national heritage and nationalist nostalgia through a reconceptualization of foods and crops from low-status to high-status. They may also have implications for the resilience of cuisines or agricultural biodiversity.

On a larger scale, the marketing of samai, thenai, and cookbooks can be understood as a kind of culinary resilience, in that the culinary uses of millets are being preserved, and perhaps enacted, through the selling of the cookbook to urban, nontribal populations. At the same time, the process of writing down fixed ingredients, amounts, and details preserves these culinary practices in specific, prescribed forms that, as Appadurai (1988:16) has noted, are not “simple or mechanical replicas of existing oral repertoires.” Published recipes are edited and selective, representing a degree of compromise between insiders and outsiders which means that nuances, distinctive quirks, and local culinary flair may be eliminated or minimized (Appadurai 1988). Moreover, the point must be made that some recipes replace rice with millets, suggesting that this is also a process of showing non-Malayali consumers how easily they can substitute millets for rice when making familiar dishes. Thus, while the practice of using millets is being preserved, it does not always reflect the ways millets might be used in households in the Kolli Hills. Nevertheless, in recording Malayali “ethnic food culture” (MSSRF 2004b: preface), the cookbook allows lowland, urban households to experience, experiment with, and taste different cuisines.

In purchasing samai and thenai, lowlanders are also helping to create a market that allows for agro-biodiversity resilience via the ongoing cultivation of grains that are endangered by the influx of nonlocal commercial crops into the hills. The marketing of millets therefore attempts to create novel desires and new demands (Appadurai 1986) for a specific food commodity in an urban environment, diverting millets from traditional field-to-table pathways, and in the process contributing to the commodification of a specific concept of tradition and authenticity tied to notions of indigenous agricultural practices and knowledge, and pristine hill environments.

Locating the sale of samai and thenai in urban areas and outside of Western-style shopping locales means that farmers who are not part of the millet-marketing project are also unlikely to buy and eat them, other than perhaps on the rare occasions when they might find themselves in town. In Thakkali Nadu, millets are not for sale. Consequently, in this nadu, resilience in cuisine and agro-biodiversity is not present as households have stopped growing minor millets and thus, due to geographical location and economic circumstances, have lost culinary access to them. Such agricultural and dietary transitions intersect with broad trends and theoretical concepts; they also have real implications for the everyday lives, practices, and aspirations of individuals. The realities of wanting the benefits and consumer power of a cash income, or choosing crops that are relatively easy to care for in times of environmental uncertainty, are central individual- and household-level points that must be balanced with broader concerns about a loss of agro-biodiversity.

Through the attempt to create a niche market for thenai and samai in the lowlands, the meanings of minor millets may be slowly changing. The hard work put into maintaining the millet cultivation and marketing project speaks to broad concerns about biodiversity and conservation, traditional knowledge, and health, each of which has relevance to ongoing global trends regarding food homogenization and efforts to reclaim traditional foods. At the same time, another shift is taking place within parts of the Kolli Hills, such that while eating samai and thenai may be tied to tradition as part of a marketing strategy, this tradition continues to be abandoned by many of the very farmers who are associated with it.

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## Notes

1. I have also worked with a fourth community, although the majority of my research has taken place with three main communities.

2. Scheduled tribes are those indigenous peoples formally recognized by the Indian government. Throughout this paper, I use the term *tribal*, rather than *indigenous* or *adivasi*. My use of *tribal* reflects the terminology the Malayali farmers themselves use.

3. This is a pseudonym.

4. This may change, as a second road into the Kolli Hills has been planned; Thakkali Nadu is one of the exterior nadus that would benefit from such a road if it is completed.

5. My analysis is based on the English edition.

6. India has officially declared obesity an emerging health concern, announcing criteria under which Indian men and women are considered obese. These criteria, based on body mass index and waist circumference measurements, are significantly different from World Health Organization (WHO) Standards (Pandey 2008). For example, new Indian standards state that women with a waist circumference greater than 31.5 inches are obese; WHO standards consider women with a waist circumference higher than 34.6 inches to be abdominally obese.

7. For example, the cookbook contains four recipes for *paniyaram*, which are grain-based fried balls with either a sweet or savory flavor. Typically, paniyaram are made with rice as the carbohydrate ingredient. The four recipes in the cookbook have added samai and thenai to the basic ingredients.

8. Perhaps this millet production and marketing project would find it beneficial to intersect with Slow Food's Ark of Taste project. Thus far, the ark lists only one Indian product, Derhadun basmati rice. The inclusion of minor millet species and landraces in the ark would likely provide publicity and support for the project.

9. Miele and Murdoch (2002) use the term *terroir* in their discussion of Slow Food in Tuscany, but I have refrained from using that term because it is particularly embedded in European and North American contexts. *Agro-ecological characteristics*, an expression used by M. S. Swaminathan (2004b) in the foreword to the millet cookbook, more clearly highlights this perspective, and is therefore more useful here.

10. In early 2007, unlike on earlier visits to the area, I noticed a large field of ragi. One household had decided to try growing some ragi again, after years of growing sweet cassava on that land.

11. "Society" is a reference to the Large-Area Multipurpose (LAMP) Society, which distributes government-ration-shop rice.

12. Some aspects of this section were presented at the 2008 Agriculture, Food and Human Values/American Society for Food Studies annual conference, entitled Resilient Culinary Cultures: Disaster, Innovation, and Change in Foodscapes.

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## *Developing Cheese at the Foot of the Alps*

Cristina Grasseni

Visiting international food exhibitions such as Turin's Slow Food Salon or the website of the forthcoming Milan's 2015 Expo (whose theme is Feeding the Planet) one witnesses the importance and timeliness of the issue of reimagining food. While developing countries seek to revalue marginalized food production, affluent Western societies, and Italy in particular, capitalize on traditions of "typical" foods<sup>1</sup> in order to make marginal rural areas more attractive to the market. Complex dynamics underlie these parallel strategies, equating quality of life with food quality, construing food as heritage, and proposing taste as a social skill.

This chapter presents data based on firsthand ethnographic fieldwork in the Alpine area of northern Italy, focusing on the role of marginal agriculture in local development and particularly on the social production of authenticity through the rediscovery of typical food. I address some of the tensions that processes of food certification and geographical denomination may cause, especially at the local level, as localities confront the global ethno-foods market and the European legislative context. I analyze the conflicting ways in which Alpine and lowland cultures of food production and consumption are portrayed, in terms of land management and the transmission of specialized knowledge.

I focus especially on mountain cheese, taking into consideration the transformations undergone by artisan cheese in actual, visual, and rhetorical terms. *Alpage* cheese is a product of the summer season, traditionally linked to the practice of taking herds to graze in high-altitude pastures

(1,000 meters and above) while grass is there, to reserve the lower pastures near villages for haymaking.

Marketing this cheese as typical has an impact on the development of the locales where it is produced—both positively (as marginal rural practices attract higher visibility and new economic resources) and negatively (by heightening competition between neighboring mountain communities that offer similar products).

Constructing food as heritage means introducing a number of social and technical innovations in food production. These include the establishment of boundaries and the standardization of actions, routines, and working environments through protocols of production (Grasseni 2007a). These transformations in turn impact the contexts of production, such as the following:

- The regimentation of the production process into protocols (such as identifying critical steps in production and distribution, which are then subject to monitoring)
- The identification of rigid boundaries that delineate the areas of production for the “authentic” food, especially in order to obtain European Union–acknowledged Denomination of Protected Origin (PDO) or Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) certification
- The injection of technological innovation under the guises of technical expertise and consultancy in chemistry or logistics
- The transformation of raw materials, in this case curdled milk, whose bacterial life may be neutralized and then reintroduced in the form of cultivated ferments, in order to calibrate it to the average consumer’s taste

These aspects contribute to the standardization and routinization of the producers’ practices, and of their own perspectives on cheese making, as they become involved in the commodification of local recipes and foodstuffs. Many social actors contribute to this scenario (local producers, technical consultants, and local officials to name just a few), as they are positioned at the interface between local cultures of production and consumption on the one hand, and global networks of distribution on the other. Though this local-global encounter normally contributes to the standardization of taste and a “dumbing down” of local crafts and knowledge (see Herzfeld 2007), I am interested in highlighting how new cultural and social formations may also emerge as a result of processes of “self-folklorization.”

The rediscovery of traditional cheese production in the Alps can be considered a marginal phenomenon within the wider context of food

production and consumption within the European Union (EU), but it illustrates some of the most controversial aspects of the core strategies of food management—and of the development of marginal rural areas—in contemporary Europe.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the rediscovery of local cultures of taste can be seen as a particular kind of occidentalism (Carrier 1995:17); namely, as a way to discriminate internally between those areas and populations adhering to standard models of development and citizenship, and those in need of alternative models of development and participation in decision making. I will show how this phenomenon creates particular kinds of conditions and pressures for specific local systems, especially in their relationship with the market and with local politics.

The relationship among markets, ethics, and politics comes to the fore when one tries to evaluate the many possible relationships among tradition, ecology, local and global distribution, tacit knowledge, and technicalization in the Italian Alps today. Models of local development in mountain rural areas often focus on the reinvention (Grasseni 2007a) of typical local products such as alpage cheese (Grasseni 2011).

My ethnographic work on traditional mountain cheese in the Italian Alps and how it is being “reinvented” dates back to the late 1990s and takes into consideration the dialectics between artisanal cheese production with its unconventional modes of consumption in the mountains, and the realities of contemporary local systems of production. I focus in particular on how market interest in “traditional” recipes and “local” products influences regional economies. Debate around the preservation of local and traditional foods is heated, whether the focus is on their authenticity or their viability as a resource for local economic development (these two aspects are often entwined).<sup>3</sup> Predictably, the poetics and politics of traditional products intertwine in many aspects: the ways in which local recipes for niche products, such as alpage cheese, are being recontextualized within projects for sustainable development and ecotourism; the particular visual strategies with which they are marketed and reinvented; and the political struggles and conflicts that the reinvention of traditional foods causes in local communities and regional economies.<sup>4</sup>

It is therefore misleading to think of the Alpine world as one of uniform simplicity and mechanical solidarity, or as one in which a direct link between the consumer and the producer is the norm. Rather, the link is intensely complex and often characterized by an increasing number of intermediaries and, correspondingly, by greater skills that producers must have in order to promote their product to a differentiated, regulated, and discriminating market. Some of these skills can be viewed as competence

in modern-day traditional production, spanning quality and safety certification, distribution, logistics, and communication.

Ethnographic work on the reinvention of traditional mountain cheese in the Italian Alps highlights the many, sometimes conflicting relationships between ecology and politics, local and global distribution, and tacit knowledge and technicalization (Grasseni 2007a). Regional economies in Europe increasingly draw on cultural diversity as a resource for local economic development. The idiom of “local culture” is often employed as part of a broader and more complex operation of commodification of cultural diversity. It is within this process that alpage cheese is recontextualized (in effect, *translated*) within the framework of a “global hierarchy of value” (Herzfeld 2004).<sup>5</sup>

Despite the current European financial crisis, ample space remains for the development of niche and elite products for the most quality-aware and economically privileged consumers. In fact, some of the traditionally marginal agricultural districts—typically, mountain enclosures—strive to capitalize on their vocation as producers of typical foods: casting mountain cheese as a potential gourmet commodity should encourage local development and entrepreneurship. While the politics of the underlying development model would aim at empowering the peasants, the poetics of mountain cheese consumption often assume a hedonistic flavor: the diversity of mountain cheese justifies the interpretation of cheese tasting as an expert skill. As the act of eating cheese becomes increasingly ritualized, local cheese is invested with cultural meaning as *heritage*.

Place-based foods are often linked to the specific identities of localities, territories, and communities of practice. A cultural diversity of tastes may well bear witness to the sustainable livelihoods of their original producers—usually mountain peasants making use of local resources according to their own specifications, within the framework of historical and seasonal cycles of production. This, at its core, is the meaning of *terroir*. Amy Trubek (2008:21) proposes “a definition of *terroir* extending beyond an instrumental explanation of the soil to a more complex category” to take into account the equation (in French culture at least) between taste and local knowledge. Consistent with these ideas, Italian tourist brochures often include the phrase *saperi e sapori* (“knowledges and tastes,” in the plural) to identify what is viewed and marketed as a wealth of intangible local patrimony: landscape, *savoir-faire*, recipes, tastes, and ways of doing that would identify a particular place (whether a mountain enclosure, specific village, or entire region). Nor is this solely a European concept, developed within a peasant-centered rural society. Long (2009) reviews an

online exhibit, *Iowa Place-Based Foods*, developed by American folklorist Rachelle Saltzman for the Iowa Arts Council in cooperation with the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, which defines “place-based foods” as those having “a unique taste related to the soil, water, air, and climate of a region as well as with the ethnic or regional heritage of their producers.”<sup>6</sup>

But is this symbolic and linguistic framework, and the practices that underlie it, effectively promoting equality or socially and environmentally sustainable practices? As we shall see, the irony of the “heritage-ization” of mountain cheese lies, first, in the artificiality of the production processes induced by its economic transformation and, second, in the often conflicting outcomes of the competing agendas of social and political actors that crowd the scene around the producers and their products.

### **Self-folklorization**

Harnessing typical foods in the name of local development can foster highly standardized events such as the Fiera del Bitto in Valtellina (northern Italy). This fair developed out of the local celebrations and market day held when the herders descended from mountains at the end of the alpage season, with their herds and, most importantly, with precious fresh and matured cheeses produced on the high pastures along the Swiss border. The Fiera del Bitto—sponsored by the Lombardy region—now features all products of the Lombard Mountains along with a competition for the best alpage cheese.<sup>7</sup>

The photographs that I took during the October 2004 fair testify to a not-uncommon process of “self-folklorization” (Rivera 2004), which has more to do with selling local identity than with selling cheese itself. I draw on Italian anthropologist Alberto Maria Cirese’s reading of Gramsci to define folklorization: “by folklorization we mean a complex whole of adaptation, modification, and in general innovation (whether we might deem those ameliorative or worsening) with which an object of high culture is adopted at the popular level, adapting it to one’s needs, to one’s outlooks, and to one’s way of conceiving of life and world. Folklorization, in sum, is a process of popular connotation and its results are connoted as popular” (Cirese 1973:15; my translation).

In other words, folklorization is defined here within a Gramscian conceptual framework as a spontaneous dynamic of cultural circulation between hegemonic and subaltern classes. Without wishing to be condescending,

I use *self-folklorization* as a shorthand to highlight forms of spontaneous, collective self-representation that readily adopt self-stereotypes and other simplified renditions of collective identity (Geschiera 2009; Herzfeld 1991). Cirese (1973) insists that the anthropological issue with respect to folklorization is to understand the sociocultural significance of popularly connoted cultural practices, steering a middle course between the double perils of conceiving of folklore romantically—that is, as an apolitical matter—or of interpreting folklore as a passively subaltern and degraded form of culture.

Food plays a major role within the complex sensory formations that convey and express nostalgia and identity through memory (Seremetakis 1994; Sutton 2001). My concern is not about authenticity per se, nor do I wish to contribute to the folklore/fakelore debate here. Rather, my interest is in how crafting collective symbolic formations plays a role in naturalizing stereotypes, and I ask what role this process may play within a larger strategy of crafting food as heritage (Grasseni 2011). One of the effects of the popularization of stereotypical representations of Alpine rural life in venues such as the Fiera del Bitto is that the performances on display are far from historically or ethnographically exact. Having local residents of Morbegno stage wool-spinning or clog-making demonstrations at the Fiera del Bitto “as in the old days” is one thing; having paid entertainers perform activities having little to do with local folklore (such as flag waving or whip cracking) is another. Likewise, the mountain village—complete with miniature church, square, and artisan workshops—is re-created within totally anachronistic spaces and functions (in this case, a concrete exhibition pavilion lying well outside the historic center of Morbegno, which formerly hosted the fair).

Staged architectural reconstructions of stereotypical views of traditional mountain life are highly artificial contexts that do not contribute to cultural conservation. Food experiences, such as cheese or wine tastings, in similarly artificial contexts are likely to contribute to an overall ritualization of the consumption of “heritage foods.” For instance, figure 7.1 shows the paying participants of a tasting workshop (*laboratorio del gusto*) at the Slow Food Salon of Taste in October 2004; notice the digital cameras and the headphones, which provide translations of the expert's exposition of the characteristics of the cheeses and how to match them with the right wine.

Another stage in the removal of heritage cheese from the everyday contexts of its production is showcasing it. While ritualizing cheese consumption during special events points in the direction of intensification as a recurrent trope in the “language of festivals,” display is another ritual



Figure 7.1. “The Geometry of Taleggio: Strachì Tunt, and Strachì Quader,” a wine- and cheese-tasting workshop (*laboratorio del gusto*) at the Slow Food Salon of Taste, October 2004. (Photograph by Cristina Grasseni)

form of decontextualization that also plays a role in the celebration of heritage foods (Abrahams 1982). At fairs like the Fiera del Bitto and other events predominantly devoted to the display, sale, and consumption of food, cheese is not only eaten or tasted but also, and sometimes primarily, watched. For example, at Alpissima, l'alpeggio in città, an event held in Turin in preparation for the 2006 Olympics, alpage was celebrated as a form of traditional culture. Cheese-making workshops were offered in public parks; academic conferences were held; and the most distinctive cheese of the Piedmont Mountains was sold, tasted, and most importantly, displayed in many ways: in one case it was literally showcased in crystal pyramids decorating a conference buffet area.

The practice of display (including self-display) is partly reappropriated and partly critiqued within experiments of self-reinvention promoted by local associations such as Ruralpini (a neologism coined by merging the words *rural* and *alpine*; see [www.ruralpini.it](http://www.ruralpini.it)) or AmAMont (Amici degli Alpeggi e della Montagna, Friends of the Alpage and of the Mountain).

Led by Michele Corti, a university professor of animal husbandry who is active in the development and support of sustainable models of local development, these associations conduct collective reenactments of communal work (such as the hay fair, FenFesta a Monno, see figure 7.2). Staging routine local agricultural practices serves as a community revival and as a performance for tourist consumption. The organizers claim that in this case, bottom-up engagement meets external input and that the local community will genuinely identify with the performance through “self-celebrating the past to find a future again.” The format of the performance draws on the residents’ recollections, the traditional costumes come from actual families’ cupboards, and the location within the village is of paramount importance. Though not primarily aimed at an external gaze, the restaging welcomes the presence of tourists and cameras.

Naturally, these efforts are not devoid of risks of self-exoticization, in a way resembling the ethnographic case study about Mexican *gastronomía tradicional* that Lois Stanford presents in chapter 4 of this volume. But the collaboration between agronomy experts and farmers in sponsoring public events that reenact and preserve indigenous material culture can



Figure 7.2. The FenFesta of Monno hay festival (in Valcamonica, Brescia), August 3, 2008. Haymakers are constructing a slide from tree branches to transport the freshly cut hay (on the left) downhill. (Courtesy of Michele Corti, [www.ruralpini.it/FenFesta1.htm](http://www.ruralpini.it/FenFesta1.htm))

also help local farmers renegotiate a number of normative practices and technologies in current-day agricultural routines: from haymaking to cow herding and spreading manure to fertilize pastures. In other words, local strategies of food reinvention have to engage not only with the symbolic level of reappropriating identity, but also with the actual contexts of food production, distribution, and consumption, including the ways in which traditional foodstuffs are being transformed by food biotechnologies, agricultural logistics, and technologies—as we shall see in the following sections. But which objects and relationships that are systematically absent from the collective imaginary about food are relevant to its actual production, distribution, and consumption? Which other objects and images prevail?

### **Poetics of Authenticity**

Local strategies of development based on creating a patrimony for local culture and identity depend on the capacity to produce a vision of locality that suits hegemonic expectations. In the Alpine region, food production intertwines intimately with the commodification of intangible cultural heritage, with tourism development, and with conservation issues. Each of these has implications for local practices of food production, representation, and commercialization. Fabris (2008) has stressed how food marketing makes use of a predominantly visual mode of representation located in the “post-postmodern” condition of the “consumer-actor.” Food is consumed virtually, through media representation (“consumo mediatico,” Bindi 2007) in both new and established institutional and cultural frameworks, such as folk festivals, eco-museums, and food museums.

Food is not just fuel for the body, but also a system of signs. The virtual consumption of food through specific communicative styles is part and parcel of the redetermination of the value of food through distribution and consumption networks. These include the media, delicatessens, and restaurants but also bottom-up movements of responsible consumption, critical rebranding, and alternative food networks that proliferate thanks in part to digital formats.

The poetics of authenticity is a visual and narrative strategy for marketing food which evokes sensory landscapes and rhythms of daily life that modern urban consumers long for. It evokes a dream of skilled discernment that can help them overcome the daily bombardment with chaotic and deceiving mass marketing and mass-produced commodities, a dream

of social harmony and of well-kept but unspoiled natural surroundings, something that Elizabeth Finnis also writes about (chapter 6) with regard to the marketing of millets as coming from a healthy environment and produced by “traditional” people.

Whether for tourist consumption (Urry 1995) or for a new eco-gastronomic imaginary, mountain foodstuffs are marketed through visual and narrative strategies promoting a holistic vision of the relationship among the mountain landscape, animal welfare, and food authenticity. Nevertheless, the recurrent visualization of pristine Alpine landscapes and of traditional lore and artifacts clashes with the standardization of food production protocols, the certification of food products, and the influence of distribution channels.

The symbolic representation of food is often connected with claims of identity or territorial belonging, assigning ancestral or even mythical origins to traditional foods whose historical origins are often the object of a veritable invention of tradition (Hobsbawm 1983). By this I mean that genuine historical research on local foods coexists uneasily at times with the real commercial interests of backdating the origin of a mountain cheese to, say, Pliny. “Innovation” and “renovation” scenarios dialectically coexist in an “algebra of continuity” (Bausinger 1969) of which both producers and distributors seem to be politically and culturally aware when they play up the complementarity between “tradition as a principle . . . and progress as a vocation.”<sup>8</sup>

In general, the role of the media is paramount, both in packaging food as typical for purposes of virtual consumption, and in shaping public perceptions of food via strategic communication. Both national and local networks simultaneously target several layers of collective and individual strategies and ideologies through which typical products become objects of emotional, economic, and political patrimony. In particular, television is a powerful actor in the process of constructing gastronomic imaginaries connected with typical food production through discourses and representations of traditional food (Bindi 2007). Social representations, discourses, and argumentation become involved in the processes of constructing the category of “typical food” through the media. Different television broadcasts, such as cooking programs and food reports, contribute not only to defining food traditions but also to reaffirming and transforming the category of traditional food over the long term.

Moreover, networks of retail stores and restaurants (though having a range of styles, targeted consumers, and national or international distribution) can contribute to reconceptualizations of typical and local products.

Such reconceptualizations may include the incorporation of low-status foods in haute cuisine and elite restaurants (following the model of luxury commodities), as well as the revaluation of peasant and poor foods in national cuisines. Interesting examples come from agricultural trade union and smallholder association sponsorship of zero-mile restaurants, named after the slogan coined by Tim Lang (Lang and Heasman 2004).

Zero-mile menus aim for the use of only foodstuffs produced locally and in season. Hard-core versions of zero-mile networks propose the exclusive use of local and organic foodstuffs, or of local, organic, and Slow Food-recognized products. In some cases, the new philosophy of food sustainability hybridizes peasant cuisine with gourmet clients and resorts. For instance, in the Bergamo area, not far from the venues of the previously mentioned fairs, a local Slow Food charter sponsors events such as *La cucina degli avanzi* (leftovers cuisine), featuring well-known cooks and elite restaurant owners who plan menus that recycle foods left over from the day before, including cheese on grilled polenta. This self-conscious game of rehabilitation and revaluation of kitchen leftovers combines aesthetic pleasure with ethical behavior, distinctive sensations, and a desire to “do the right thing.”

This phenomenon recalls the transformation of alpaca meat into a kind of highland haute cuisine in Bolivia and Peru, as discussed by Lisa Markowitz (chapter 2). The “dirty Indian food” of peasants takes on a novel meaning when framed in the discourses of healthy eating and of national heritage. Crucially, such newfound respectability has important economic implications for the producers and localities now catering to the tourist trade and to upmarket gastronomic trends. While Alpine peasant lifestyles assume a new ethical appeal as a food culture of moderation and sustainability, the *novo andino* in Latin America caters to a comparable niche market for ethnic foods.

The Eataly chain of markets is another example of urban rethinking of consumers’ need for a direct relationship with food producers. After opening its first store in Turin, in a distinctive location next to the former Lingotto Fiat factory (which now hosts the biennial Slow Food Salon of Taste), Eataly has opened outlets in Milan, Bologna, Tokyo, and most recently New York. Following the philosophy of founder Oscar Farinetti, Eataly provides an urban center promoting an “ecogastronomic ideology” (Venturini 2008). This ideology revolutionizes the supermarket model, basing it on a new philosophy of assigning an appropriate price to quality; privileging traditional local foods; and providing a single location where customers can attend workshops and events, shop, and receive information

(Callon, Millo, and Muniesa 2007; Strasser 1989). This model thus combines modern logistics with traditional practices, and some commentators view it as succeeding in bending “supermarket organization to positively contribute to the de-growth campaign” (Venturini 2008).

Other European examples of experiments in reinventing food, including food distribution and logistics, along ethical, slow, or traditional lines abound. For instance, the Belgian high-end fast-food chain Exki (whose slogan is “Natural, Fresh and Ready”) has stores in Italy, France, and Luxembourg, as well as Belgium. The ice-cream chain GROM (founded in Turin and now with outlets in more than twenty Italian towns, including Bergamo, as well as in Paris and New York) specializes in ice cream made from fresh milk and traditional, traceable products (such as PGI nuts from Piedmont). Examples outside Europe include Mos Burger, the environmentally friendly Japanese fast-food chain that bans plastic bags, uses recycled containers, and certifies its vegetables as fresh (*Mos* stands for “Mountain, Ocean, Sun”).

All of these networks and retail philosophies share similar communicative strategies, interacting with local cultures of taste primarily through media exposure. Not only dedicated television channels, such as *Gambero Rosso* (on Italian satellite television), but even works of fiction and newspaper columns in the national and local press highlight and present recipes and local foodstuffs as items of “cultured taste,” and thereby contribute to a widespread recasting of food and nutrition in terms of health education.

From this point of view, the rediscovery of the experience of eating as a form of knowledge of the environment and of self-care is novel in cognitive, aesthetic, and social terms (especially since it is itself mediated through the channels of mass consumption and the mass media). This fact heightens the need for critical reflection on the multiple intermediaries between food practices and styles on the one hand, and the diverse semiotic artifacts that represent and disseminate them on the other. This is particularly true of market preferences (including those for organic produce or ethical consumption) and of current marketing strategies (from branding to exhibitions). Although there is nothing inherently wrong about this novel development in food consumer culture, the idea that I wish to explicate in the following section is that this consumption is not always accompanied by complete knowledge or critical awareness of the ways in which the very processes and tools that make marginal foods available to a larger audience (namely standardization through protocols, certification, and commercial distribution) transform the foods’ very nature.

## Lost in Translation

As we have seen, the poetics of authenticity aims at marketing a traditional/modern, rural/urban, highland/lowland divide that is in fact highly hybridized. Such stereotypical distinctions are nevertheless very useful as indigenous classifications (Bowker and Star 1999) to map areas of investigation within which food is categorized along the semantic poles of natural/artificial or traditional/industrial (Neresini and Rettore 2008). When they come to media attention, for instance in cases perceived as controversial or causing conflict, the political and social nature of these distinctions appears more clearly. For example, in the cases of transgenic soya, seedless tangerines, or pasteurized mountain cheese the natural/artificial boundary is not fixed, nor is it entirely devoid of deconstruction. In each case, techno-scientific innovation is not a mere technological intervention but a real transformation of the cultural identity of the food, which happens without social and epistemological debate, collective self-consciousness, or reflection on changing social practices.

Especially in the case of contemporary food production, it is difficult to determine what lies inside versus outside of science and technology. Several studies of the sociology of science have shown how economic interests and political decision making play roles in science (see, for instance, Felt and Wynne 2007). Both the history of science (Shapin 2003) and the sociology of science have shown that the boundaries of the laboratory are porous. For instance, bovine spongiform encephalitis, or “mad cow disease,” can be considered the result of an *in vivo* experiment that also changed our “timescapes” of risk perception regarding food (Adam 1998).

It is of use, then, to focus on “boundary objects” (Star and Griesemer 1989): in the history and sociology of science, these go-betweens have been theorized as facilitating the flow of information between different realms of expert practice. But at the same time, precisely because they lie at the intersection of discourses and practices, they often catalyze the controversial aspects of this communication/contamination. For instance, consider the milk ferments used in cheese manufacturing, or the materials used for food processing, packaging, and storage. Their selection and regulation are subject to vehement controversies: is glass or wood preferable for milk storage and cheese handling? Should aluminum or linen be used for cheese wrapping and surfacing? Is straw or marble best for separating and isolating the cheese? To focus on the reciprocal recalibration of expert practice and local knowledge means posing not only the problem of innovation, but also that of standardization.

Marketing a rhetorical divide between the Alpine traditional world vis-à-vis the modernized, technological lowland world in fact presupposes a specific view of the mountains and of the plains as stereotypes, respectively, of traditional and of intensive breeding practices. But an ethnographic knowledge of the rural Alpine world makes one dubious about such a straightforward divide. In general, the mountains are assumed to be a place where reviving marginal foods is just a matter of modernizing *what is already there*. It is also assumed that a higher diversification of recipes and products in the mountains is the straightforward result of isolation and noncommunication between different valleys and between the mountains and the lowlands. Neither of these assumptions is necessarily true.

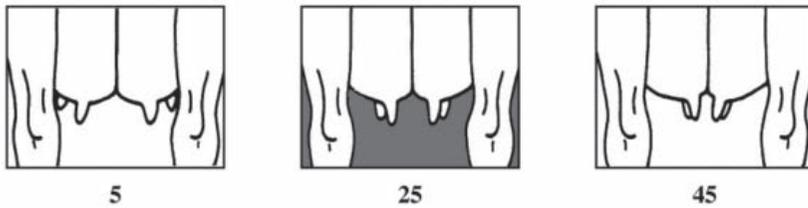
For instance, the Italian Brown breed of dairy cows grazing the pastures in the Italian Alps are in most cases the result of a long process of breed selection through artificial insemination that is aimed at transforming the animals' bodies into something akin to "milk machines," as the Friesian cows employed in lowland intensive breeding are commonly named.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, the standardization of breeding is a global process that is highly significant in Europe, where the politics and logistics of food production are heavily determined by agricultural aid and the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union. In particular, standard globalized protocols for breed selection have substantial geopolitical impact on the European mountains.

Among the more startling and visible results of this process of breed improvement is genetic selection for cows with short, symmetrically placed, straight nipples—the kind best adapted to machine milking—or the preference for thin, rather than fat, cows whose metabolism channels most of their calories into milk production (see figure 7.3).

The shaping of the Italian Brown cow (supposedly an eminently Alpine breed) thus entails a long history of breed selection through genealogical indexing and inbreeding, culminating with the introduction of a linear module for the morpho-functional evaluation of dairy cows of this breed, initially devised in 1996 in the United States by the Brown Swiss Cattle Breeders' Association.

Animals that have been selected for maximum milk production are hardly suited for the energetic and dangerous life of grazing in mountain pastures (as opposed to living in warm and comfortable barns), and often need dietary supplements that change the composition of the milk they produce. Whether or not she is physically located in a pasture, a cow produces different milk if she grazes exclusively on fresh grass versus on maize-based fodder with supplements to increase her productivity.



*Figure 7.3.* Linear module for morpho-functional evaluation of Italian Brown cows. This is one of nineteen bodily traits used to evaluate how functional a cow's body is for milk production. This module highlights that the nipples should be straight, to facilitate machine milking. (Courtesy of Associazione Nazionale Allevatori di Razza Bruna, ANARB [www.anarb.it](http://www.anarb.it))

Paradoxically, it is possible for mountain dairy cows to produce what is marketed as mountain milk without even feeding on local pastures, as the practice of importing hay bales and fodder is now standard in the mountains too. Breeding ceases to be a part-time family practice, becoming either full-time employment for a few operators or being abandoned entirely, leaving the many small family fields and meadows unkempt and ungrazed. It does not take long for pastures to revert to brush and then woods, contributing to a landscape increasingly devoid of active traces of human activity in the mountain retreats farther away from tourist resorts. This is a common scenario in the northern Italian mountains that have not been otherwise developed for industry or tourism.

The complexity of the agrifood system introduces many controversial facets to this process: from the economic and legal aspects to the technologies of production, together with the long-term cultural-historical, socio-anthropological, and political trends. In the case of the world food scenario, we are facing contexts of production of techno-scientific knowledge and of food itself that often decide the logic and parameters of their own functioning, according to their own epistemological, political, and economic criteria. Consider, to name just a few examples, the logic of market survival of large brand-name consortia vis-à-vis the promotion of micro contexts of quality production; the preservation of the procedures of intensive agriculture vis-à-vis nitrogen-based soil pollution due to overmanuring around intensive breeding farms; and the standardization of protocols of production vis-à-vis the preservation of the diversity of local tastes and recipes.

Within this landscape, there exists no all-encompassing recipe for local cultures of cheese: their destinies depend on creative, ad-hoc solutions

and compromises between tradition and modernity. Small traditional producers could reinvent themselves as custodians of bio-cultural diversity, becoming experts in either highlighting themselves as modern and well-informed entrepreneurs of local commodities, or alternatively investing in the sustainable and intangible heritage of local histories, tacit knowledge, and living skills.

In fact, the cheese portrayed by the poetics of authenticity as being from (or for) “the good life” of both its producers and consumers needs to be transformed from alpage cheese into gourmet food. This translation also implies its symbolic and socioeconomic displacement from the practices of marginal mountain agriculture into a “global hierarchy of value” (Herzfeld 2004). Such translation and displacement entails many acts of calibration (Grasseni 2007a) from a subsistence food to a marketable product. The process involves (1) commissioning historical and laboratory studies certifying traditional origin, nutritional content, taste, color, texture, and aroma; (2) establishing production protocols and certified areas of PDO; (3) being aware of and using legal tools to defend and protect these designated areas and protocols; (4) standardizing to some degree the tools and curdling agents described in the protocols; and, last but not least, (5) branding and promotion using sophisticated communication strategies and media coverage to target tourists and deli customers.

Within small mountain communities, none of this happens without lengthy negotiations and clashes of interest around the delineation of denominations of production, the recipes spelled out in the production protocols, or indeed the package design and choice of names for product labeling. So, for instance, the Taleggio cheese from Val Taleggio has undergone a long transition from its humble origins as *stracchino*. It began as a fresh cheese typically produced during the transhumance, using the milk of tired cows (*vacche stracche*) pausing on their way to and from the high-mountain pastures. Then it was exhibited in 2004 at the Slow Food Salon of Taste in a workshop entitled “The Geometry of Taleggio: Strachì Tunt, and Strachì Quader” (see figure 7.1). This public presentation was part of a long process of negotiation initially designed to establish a Slow Food presidium in Val Taleggio to preserve the production of Strachitunt (as opposed to the more standard square Taleggio cheese). Slow Food presidia are projects that preserve and defend small-scale, quality operations that actively maintain traditional production practices. In this case, the tasting ceremony was a conscious act of showcasing that could have become part of a product branding process, including the signing of a production protocol as a Slow Food presidium. Unfortunately for the

Strachitunt producers, this process has not yet come to fruition, precisely because of the many factors discussed previously. The costs and logistics of converting entirely to organic farming and renouncing imported hay and dietary supplements have so far stalled the negotiations.

Has Val Taleggio been so deeply contaminated by global agribusiness practices of agricultural production that the Slow Food organic standards have become unattainable for local producers? It would seem not, since at the time of writing the same Slow Food charter had succeeded in establishing another presidium called Stracchino all'Antica (Stracchino Made in the Old Ways), which protects the few small, family-based local cheese producers located in the same area. Many of these producers do not belong to the local cooperative that makes PDO Taleggio, nor to the consortium for PDO Strachitunt, but make strachitunt and stracchino (similar to taleggio, but made with unpasteurized milk and often less matured).

All this brings us back to the politics of the reinvention of food. The rediscovery of traditional foods as a motor for regional economic development has been criticized for hinging more or less explicitly on the social privilege of the few who have the time and resources to eat slow, thus reinforcing the element of class distinction that is the very fuel and motivation of their "right to pleasure" (Wilk 2006). On the other hand, a number of local actors, including but not limited to Slow Food, respond to conflicting and contradictory pressures to recast local production. If on the one hand the expectations of discriminating customers are so high, in terms of quality and authenticity, that only residual producers can meet them, on the other hand local regulators are under pressure to adjust traditional dairying infrastructures (such as the refuge locations for both herders and cattle on the high pastures, the *baite*) to conform to both hygiene regulations and incentives and projects for the local development of marginal rural areas.

Finally, as a continuously self-transforming boundary object placed between institutions and the public, the socio-technical network retains paramount importance. The sociologist of science Bruno Latour (1988, 2008) has convincingly demonstrated that scientific cultures are successful when they overflow from the laboratory and proceed to a capillary dissemination of artifacts and processes in society. This was what happened with the "pasteurization of France" (Latour 1988), when Louis Pasteur first convinced the public of the existence of microbes, then established a functional alliance with the breeders association to test his vaccination technique against anthrax.

Standardizing tools, recipes, and curdling agents is a very powerful globalizing move that introduces an important element of contradiction

in the current cultural trend, which values local diversity but defends it through a bureaucratization of authenticity and the proliferation of audits, certifications, and geographical denominations.<sup>10</sup>

### **Conclusion: the Typical, the Global, and the Local (Or, the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly?)**

The practices of food reinvention have economic, social, and political consequences on the one hand, and symbolic, cultural, and visual rhetorics on the other. I have argued that their reciprocal interactions are not always consistent and that one must address several topics at once in order to grasp them:

1. The “social life” (Appadurai 1998) of local products involves customers, friends, producers, their networks of exchange, and the channels of communication of associated knowledge and skills. Their transformation into typical products entails a degree of self-folklorization (their symbolic and cultural significance often reproducing and confirming self-stereotyping).
2. The symbolic construction of food through iconicization, virtualization, and ritualization of its consumption constructs a poetics of authenticity that is reinforced by the proliferation of tasting courses and the increased social value of “knowing how to choose” your wine, cheese, and bread, a trend in itself increasingly diffused and mass-marketed.
3. Technologies of localization and a bureaucracy of authenticity are entailed in recasting local foods. Their fine-grained and most critical passages are often lost in translation: from the poetics of authenticity that surrounds them it is not apparent how actions, routines, working environments, and protocols of production change in the standardization and calibration of the contexts of production, and how these changes are incorporated in practice and discourse. Nor do these facts become objects of critical reflection and awareness, except in very isolated cases.

Reinventing tradition can ensure the survival of local recipes and skills. At the same time it puts enormous strain on producers, distributors, local administrators, and agricultural advisors to adapt local networks of production and local cultures of taste to both material and rhetorical strategies for the commodification of locality.

Italian mountain cheese is being translated into a resource for local economic development, both drawing on and testifying to cultural diversity. Ethical consumption, slow consumption, and upmarket trends valuing typical, traditional products foster decentralized and regional models of development, for different reasons and among different though overlapping social networks, creating both new opportunities and challenges.

The dimension of local development and the real economic interests underlying the rediscovery of traditional recipes is also an interesting lens through which “ethical consumption” can be read (see Grasseni in press). Neo-ruralism coexists in a dialectic with a range of social phenomena. The resurgent interest among urbanites in the rural and in peasant wisdom (in terms of sustainability, tacit knowledge, and a nostalgia for rootedness) influences some rural communities to adapt their collective modes of self-representation to the expectations and, to some extent, the stereotypes of urban imaginaries. The establishment of patrimonies for local foods co-evolves with new public perceptions of food safety and food sustainability. All converge in the direction of the construction and defense of identity boundaries. This responds to longings for sustainability in both environmental and sociocultural terms, although additional types of social experiments in participation and co-responsibility add to the complex scenario of food reinvention (Corum, Rosenzweig, and Gibson 2001; Halweil 2004; Henderson and Van En 1999). It is relevant to distinguish between a market-oriented nostalgia for authenticity and more accurate strategies of reviving marginal foods, for instance through networks of alternative consumption (Roos, Terragni, and Torjusen, 2007).

Several questions remain unanswered: Which types of local products are singled out as significant representatives of local identities and skills? Who decides? What are the implications for local political dynamics? On the basis of the ethnographic evidence presented here, it appears that communities who can reinvent themselves as progressive peasants that can meet European hygiene standards while diversifying their product throughout regional and global networks (from Slow Food presidia to alternative food networks, from seasonal tourist fairs to conventional distribution networks) are those best positioned to benefit from the reinvention of mountain cheese as a typical and traditional commodity.

On the other hand, the added value that is created in the process of translating and displacing mountain cheese within a “global hierarchy of value” (Herzfeld 2004) also incurs social costs. Producers experience increased pressures to update their infrastructure and production processes, while local officials desperately seek the right kind of local resources to be redesignated as traditional. The risk is that such reinvention, translation,

and displacement may result in socially unsustainable practices, creating “aliens within the gates” or “insufficiently Western people”—as illuminated in Carrier’s (1995: xi, 17) concept of Occidentalism.

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## Notes

1. I use “typical foods” as a direct translation from the Italian *tipico*, equivalent to the French *produits de terroir*, where *terroir* implicitly refers to the anthropological knowledge of the land and of the best ways to make it productive. This is why it becomes *tipico* in Italian, namely, unique to that country (and its knowledge set).

2. According to the EU Agenda 2000 (the manifesto for European strategic planning, 2000–2006), structural funds for development are targeted at underdeveloped regions (Objective 1), regions in decline (Objective 2), structural development of rural areas (Objective 5b), and regions with very low population density (Objective 6). To qualify, rural areas must meet at least two of four criteria: (1) population density less than one hundred inhabitants per square kilometer, (2) an agricultural employment rate double that of the EU average, (3) an unemployment rate higher than the EU average, and (4) population decline. Five percent of the European population meets these criteria.

3. Relevant debates appear in specialized journals (for instance, *Caseus*) and in online forums such as Associazione Stampa Agroalimentare Italiana ([www.asa-press.com](http://www.asa-press.com)); Quale formaggio ([www.qualeformaggio.it](http://www.qualeformaggio.it)); Ruralpini ([www.ruralpini.it](http://www.ruralpini.it)); and Associazione Nazionale per la Valorizzazione e Tutela dei Formaggi Attenuti con Latte di Animali al Pascolo ([www.anfosc.it](http://www.anfosc.it)).

4. Associations like the Slow Food movement sometimes have controversial effects on local economies, and their increasing political power in negotiating models of product development rally different actors and rhetoric under a single flag (Leitch 2003). A specific critique of the Slow Food movement is not within the scope of this chapter; it is merely mentioned here as one of the social actors involved in the revitalization of marginal foods.

5. On the dialectic relationship between folklore and profit, see also Lombardi Satriani (1973) and Palumbo (2003).

6. Iowa Place-Based Foods: [www.iowaartscouncil.org/programs/folk-and-traditional-arts/place\\_based\\_foods/index.htm](http://www.iowaartscouncil.org/programs/folk-and-traditional-arts/place_based_foods/index.htm) (accessed January 7, 2011).

7. In particular, the 2004 Fiera del Bitto included the Fiera Regionale Prodotti della Montagna Lombarda, a Rassegna Enogastronomica dei Sapori Insubrici (Wine and Food Festival of the Tastes of the Insubria Region), and the Mostra del Bitto (Exhibition of Bitto Cheese).

8. Bausinger (1969) is quoted by Bendix (1997:253 n. 33) as part of her critique of Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) simplistic analysis of traditions of "authenticity" versus "invention." For the commercial slogan "tradition as the principle, progress as a vocation," see the Arrigoni website: [www.arrigonivaltaleggio.it](http://www.arrigonivaltaleggio.it) (accessed January 11, 2011).

9. See, for instance, Grasseni (2007b, 2009).

10. Some laboratories and biological studies have led to the reintroduction of porous (e.g., wooden) tools to facilitate natural processes of cheese curdling, the preservation of a higher diversity of production environments (including "traditional" bacteria), and the demonstration of the scientific validity of some aspects of traditional practice. Analogously, local projects reintroduce autochthonous, dual-purpose breeds in lieu of specialized breeds selected for dairy farming (such as Friesians or SuperBrowns).

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# *Conclusions*

## Culture, Tradition, and Political Economy

John Brett

This conclusion identifies several theoretical themes running through the previous chapters and suggests some directions for future research on marginal foods. Why does the study of marginalized foods matter? As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, many marginal foods are or were central to subsistence strategies. The very fact they are defined as marginal speaks to the populations who use or used those foods; it speaks to the marginalization of peoples and foods, to the re-envisioning or reimagining of foods and possibilities, to the political-economic and literal incorporation of foods and foodways into another context or person. Given that, how can we understand and interpret the relationships between marginal foods and the populations who use (or used) them? What do these relationships tell us about people's encounters with the global economy, their sense of identity, their taste preferences, and so on? Because food is central to life, it carries deep symbolic meanings and cultural value. What happens to those core meanings and values as a food becomes marginalized or as a marginalized food is re-engaged and redefined in different social-political-historical circumstances? How do we think about people's engagement with their "marginalized" food(s): as an act of resistance in the face of a globalizing, homogenizing food supply, or as the active appropriation of foods, foodways, and cuisines by outsiders? How do we think about power and control in relation to marginal and marginalizing foods? Each chapter in this volume is grounded in place-specific data but speaks to these larger issues and concerns.

## Central Themes

Each of the chapters addresses the “what, how, and why” of marginality to one degree or another. The authors have highlighted some very important points and I will frame them and highlight future research directions. I do not intend this as an exploration of all possible theoretical threads; rather, I seek to identify the central themes that run through most, if not all, of the chapters. I take seriously the charge by Mintz (1985), Wolf (1982), and others to “think big,” to consider any given phenomenon or process in its larger social-political-historical context. Thus, as I develop in more detail below, what is important about this collection of papers is the interaction, through detailed ethnographic examination, of the social, the political-economic, and the historical with cultural processes and individual and collective engagement with marginal(ized) foods. What is not included in these chapters is the deeply meaning-centered, micro-level interpretive approach as articulated by Long and contributors (2004).

Throughout this volume, four broad themes emerge, each of which I will explore in more detail:

1. Process
2. Dynamics of marginality
3. Political-economic contexts
4. Importance of culture: how people actively engage their food and foodways, both their own and those of the “other,” variously defined

## A Few Thoughts on Process

These ethnographically rich chapters each highlight important elements of “marginal” foods. Each chapter examines some aspect of process,<sup>1</sup> doing what modern anthropology does best: connecting the local with the global. The importance of examining the dynamics and processes of the local-global interface lies in our need to see and understand the impacts of and responses to global forces on food, foodways, and cuisine, broadly defined. This diversity of responses is important because global economic forces have an undeniable impact but are neither universal nor all-powerful. While clearly the impact on local conditions cannot be ignored, people are not passive in response to change; they make decisions, respond, and adapt. If there is only a single message to be gleaned from these chapters, it is this: because food (both its production and consumption) is at the nexus

of social life and cultural belief, people will respond to change through resistance, accommodation, or adaptation. It is important that we understand these responses in light of the centrality of food and the complexity of the globalized economic system. Finnis, for example, makes it clear that farmers move away from subsistence farming to cash crops for very obvious and defensible reasons; they are quite capable of articulating that changes in rainfall patterns have made much of their land unproductive for former subsistence activities, and there are very useful things one can do with money (e.g., education, better housing). So, while each chapter ultimately speaks to the well-worn but still important arguments around “structure” and “agency,” the authors’ close attention to detail lets us think in new and interesting ways about issues of food, foodways, and cuisine. The very idea of marginalized foods demands close ethnographic analysis; how else can we understand the process and fact of marginalization except through detailed exploration of food, either in or out of place? I will argue it is the political-social-historical forces that put in motion the processes of marginalization but, truism though it be, people are not passive recipients of global forces but actively interact to resist, to create meaning from, and to (re)engage with their marginalized foods.

## Subsistence Foods

Importantly, the contributors to this volume write about foods that were or are core or subsistence foods; that is, foods that were or are the central items in everyday food strategies, the “What’s for dinner?” foods. As such, they are imbued with cultural meaning and social significance, and are deeply embedded in local ecological processes. Elizabeth Rozin (1982) argued that cuisine is based in place, ecology, and culture—meaning that a cuisine emerges as a result of ecological opportunities and constraints (available foods), human manipulation of those foods (processing and cooking), and cultural and symbolic meaning attached to them, whether in terms of ingredients or final consumed product. More recently, Trubek (2008) and Saltzman (n.d.) have explored the concept of *terroir*, or “taste of place,” considerably expanding the basic concepts developed by Rozin and the original French context as applied to wine and other foods. This idea that place matters is important in light of the way the authors are analyzing marginality. We can perhaps expand the idea that *terroir* creates “*categories* that frame perception and practices . . . a foodview” (Trubek 2008:18, emphasis original). Her close analysis of how *terroir* became

established as a signature French concept linking processes of place culture and society mirrors my argument that each case in this volume exemplifies the interactions among culture, place, and social-historical-political processes.

The alpaca (and the llama farther south) are well adapted to the cold desert characteristic of much of highland Peru and Bolivia, producing food and fiber where no other domesticated animal or plant can. As such, they are central to highland Andean cosmology and are invoked in everything from fertility to dispute resolution to appeasing the mountain gods (Bastien 1978); similarly, it is not overstating the case to assert the centrality of corn in traditional Mesoamerican society; it is much, much more than “just food” (Pilcher 1998; Sandstrom 1991). This centrality becomes particularly salient given the kinds of changes described and people’s responses to them: Efforts to improve the quality of alpaca meat and to commercialize it are arguably important, both nutritionally for the population at large and economically for the herders: meat is expensive and herders are generally poor. The agriculturally marginal lands on which the alpaca and llama graze are extensive, resulting in wide opportunities for producers and consumers alike. The NGO plans Markowitz describes are very logical and, if followed, could produce important benefits. But if demand rises sufficiently to make selling meat a more profitable option than marketing fiber, what is to prevent herders from intensifying animal production still further, imperiling an already fragile and overtaxed ecosystem? Instead of culling animals with poor-quality fiber to get a little more money through meat sales, what would prevent them from increasing herd size to get “a lot more” money, seeking to maximize income in the short term over longer term, more sustainable management? The active expropriation and redefinition of a regional cuisine as a marketing tool that Stanford describes drags a cuisine onto the global stage, resulting in dramatic changes in people’s relations to their foods and dishes. Production processes, underlying perceptions, and values are influenced, and the evaluation and definition of “good food” shifts from the domestic to the public sphere; the very nature, value, and evaluation of food changes. What becomes of farmers who are encouraged to reinvest in a crop they have abandoned for apparently all the right reasons? These farmers have actively responded to regional market demands, making what appear to be rational ecological and economic decisions by largely abandoning millet production in favor of a crop that grows better under current climatic conditions, is easier to manage, and yields more cash income. What is “authentic” food or cuisine when every step in the process is codified in

law and hemmed in by production and processing rules, whether governmental (e.g., European Union) or nongovernmental (e.g., Slow Food)? Much like the defining of something as marginal (see below), does the very process of defining what authenticity is and how it is to be achieved draw into question the concept of authentic? Closer analysis in the style of Trubek (2008) will help us understand these apparently contradictory processes through which authenticity is in some way “staged” (Molz 2004), losing what may have been the inherently authentic (terroir) while being replaced by a bureaucratically created set of rules and regulations designed to promote and protect its authenticity. By defining the local using global rules do we in essence define the local out of existence? Do we fall prey to the very homogenization we profess to be resisting? Studies of the kind found in this volume allow us to examine these larger contextual questions in ways that rosy, time-limited evaluation studies generally do not. A central lesson from these studies is simply that the details matter; if we are to understand how subsistence foods are consumed by global forces, how they are transformed from the meaning-centered local to the mass-consumption global, then we need these kinds of detailed studies that allow us to draw from multiple analytical frameworks.

## Marginality

As Elizabeth Finnis points out in her introduction to this volume, “marginality” is historically (temporally), culturally, socially, or geographically context-specific; the processes and interactions by which the nature or status of food’s marginality changes are what interest us here: Why in fact is a food marginal(ized) and how did it get that way? What is interesting about the concept of marginality, and an issue that is raised only briefly in some of these chapters, is that marginality has to be defined relative to something else: *sinonggi* became a “marginal” food as the rice-centric cuisine of the dominant Javanese spread throughout Indonesia, and it remains marginal in spite of its “popularity” in the politically charged atmosphere of decentralizing Indonesia. *Sinonggi* is engaged by political activists and politicians specifically because of its marginality: consuming a marginal and ethnic-specific food to create a sense of solidarity with specific segments of the population is a literal act of incorporation. Even if for crude political purposes, such engagements with a marginal food represent a studied rejection of the national cuisine (rice) through the process of (re) assigning value to a previously marginal food and, more importantly, the

people who ate it. This creates important symbolic links among the food, the population, and the outside politician distinct from prior associations.

The corn and vegetable diet of the Purhépecha of Michoacán is marginal only in comparison to what passes for or is defined as the “national cuisine” of Mexico, the dynamics of which change in the face of the host of forces and factors that are broadly part of a globalizing food system. Governmental efforts to capitalize on the exotic in the interest of marketing to tourists further defines indigenous cuisine's marginal status as it is actively and deliberately defined into existence, as the Purhépecha cuisine is codified and displayed for external, largely commercial and political purposes. The very act of codification makes it exotic: writing down recipes, competing for the most authentic dish of a cuisine makes it a “thing” set apart from the living dynamics of foodways and equally distinct from the national cuisine. Its status as a cuisine becomes static and artificial because its existence is defined in relation to the national cuisine and international standards that arise through political and commercial processes and are removed from the daily, lived experience of cooking and eating in Michoacán.

Pom is the quintessential “hybrid food” (or “border food,” if we take Tex-Mex as our model), brought about through the voluntary and involuntary movement of peoples and foods that characterized the colonial era, as Mintz (1985), and Crosby (1972) before him, so eloquently argued. It is a unique blending of ingredients and cooking styles, central to the diet of Surinamese of all stripes in Surinam but exotic and marginal as a food of the relatively poor immigrants in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, pom is becoming less marginalized, more mainstream, while the Surinamese immigrant population remains poorly integrated into Dutch society; the food merges into the national cuisine independent of the population responsible for its introduction and production (see Wilk, this volume).

## The Political Economy of Marginality

The processes and changes explored in these papers are embedded in larger political-economic contexts often with nonlocal actors who have very different conceptions of local foodways and dietary values. I want to address a major thread that runs through a number of the papers, one that can be summed up as appropriation. In this context, I use *appropriation* to mean the deliberate redefinition of foods, foodways, and cuisine by outsiders according to needs and criteria independent of local needs and

concerns. This theme, alluded to in Elizabeth Finnis's introduction, nags readers throughout the papers. As each contributor details the process by which change occurs, a variety of related concepts emerge: Words like *strategic* (Finnis, Grasseni), *appropriated* (Grasseni, Wilk), *symbolic identity reappropriation* (Grasseni), *neoliberal ideologies* (Markowitz), *commercialization* (Stanford), and *marketed* (Finnis, Markowitz, Stanford, Wilk) all point to external forces acting upon food, foodways, and cuisine to re-define them in some way. This suggests an intentional process of social and political activities that manipulate food and foodways with specific intent to make changes in the food itself, public perceptions of the food, or the rules and boundaries that define authenticity. Efforts to improve the quality of alpaca meat while seeking to convert it symbolically into something desirable in order to meet specific development goals (Markowitz), or the definition, indeed appropriation, of "everyday foods" as a regional cuisine for use as a marketing tool to tourists (Stanford), the marketing of "specialty grains" as healthful alternatives (Finnis), or the very deliberate, rule-bound creation of a "heritage food" (Grasseni) are all strategic efforts initiated or controlled by nonlocal actors with specific goals and objectives. The importance of this lies in trying to understand whose goals are given priority and who drives policy change. We might think of the case detailed by Stanford as crass exploitation where local foodways are actively appropriated to meet regional or national needs, arguably at the expense of local priorities, sensibilities, and practice. Other cases are more nuanced: the international biodiversity efforts detailed by Markowitz, Finnis, and Grasseni are defined or informed by a set of global values. While there is no denying the importance and necessity of attending to issues of agricultural biodiversity, nutrition, and economic development, it is outsiders who largely drive the process and establish priorities, seeking to define the agenda independent of local concerns and decisions.

Multinational efforts to create "gastronomic heritage" sites to "preserve traditional foods" require that producers adhere to a set of rules that may run counter to their perceived best interests. Attempts to develop markets for marginalized grains or meats to preserve agricultural and biological diversity, or those to develop culinary tourism to enhance the production and quality of food widely identified with marginal, indigenous populations, all too often result in an appropriation of the marginal food in the process of redefining its new use and value. This leaves the local populations—or individuals within these populations—to respond as best they can to a range of opportunities and constraints. Notable is the lack of a participatory agenda in most of these reports; there is no sense that local voices are engaged in defining or realizing goals and policy.

Echoing Grasseni, we can think of this process as the construction of indigenous or ethnic foods and producers. Through the creation of marketable products that meet international standards and marketing strategies, outside forces construct the idea of indigenous or ethnic, in the process appropriating and extracting the food and associated images of the exotic and indigenous to meet nonlocal demands and requirements. Stanford, Grasseni, Finnis, and Markowitz all detail how various concepts around authenticity, indigenous, native, and locality are driven by external actors and local responses to those forces.<sup>2</sup> Through analyzing and understanding the process of creating a marketable product, questions of authenticity and indigenesness can be addressed. As all four authors detail in various ways, the construction of foods and cuisine as distinctive and desirable relies heavily on evoking stereotypes of indigenous ways of life as healthful, unpolluted, pure, pristine, and so on. The foods derive much of their perceived (symbolic) value as healthful and superior by virtue of these associations of authenticity and indigenesness, although the place of the alpaca in Peru presents a highly complex and interesting picture.

## Culture Matters

We can contrast the above by looking at predominantly cultural processes in which the food remains physically unaltered but the underlying symbolic meanings and values are changed. Identity is often deeply embedded in one's food and foodways; the act of eating foods "foreign" to one's own (Long 2004: ch. 1) can be an act of incorporation in order to create a sense of "identifying with" (incorporating oneself into) another's culture. In the case of *sinonggi*, politicians and political activists mobilize the symbolic value of this marginal food in their efforts to accommodate to changing electoral politics. The act of eating the "people's food" to create a sense of identity with the population speaks to the symbolic power of food, especially core subsistence foods. In the United States, this is a tried and true formula of candidates for elected office, whether the symbolic meal is Texas barbecue, New York pizza, or Chicago hot dogs. What makes the case of *sinonggi* interesting is its marginal status: politicians consume a food that almost no one else does anymore, thus creating the desired linkages and elaborating the status of a food largely eclipsed by more easily prepared, arguably more palatable, rice. Pom, in contrast to the other examples, is becoming a "mainstream" food in the Netherlands even though the immigrant Surinamese population remains largely marginalized. Pom, like many "ethnic foods," is becoming

dissociated from its “indigenous” roots. As it becomes mainstream and part of the broader, heterogeneous Dutch cuisine, it loses its identity as Surinamese food in ways similar to what has happened to “Chinese” or “Mexican” food in the United States (Bentley 2004), where there is little resemblance between what the Chinese or Mexicans eat and what is commonly thought of as Chinese or Mexican food as served in restaurants. The economic potential and nutritional value of alpaca and llama meat are obscured by the very strong history of race and class biases against the Quechua and Aymara populations that raise them. NGO efforts to make alpaca meat palatable and acceptable require changing deeply rooted cultural attitudes toward not only the indigenous people who produce it but also associated values around the “inferior” quality of the meat. The herders are accustomed to culling animals for their own consumption as a normal part of animal husbandry. What kind of attitude shifts need to occur as the animals are commercialized for meat, a “one-time” operation, versus fiber production, which is an annual process of harvesting? While efforts at improving the meat's quality, distribution, and availability are important, if it is to become more widely consumed outside of tourist venues, the profound associations with Quechua- and Aymara-speaking herders must be overcome. Similarly, efforts to market specialty millets require trafficking in cultural stereotypes of the indigenous as strong, healthy populations living in harmony with the land and producing foods that are “by nature” superior to the processed rice that forms the basis of the lowland diet. The very idea of “authentic mountain cheese” rests on notions of rustic, down-to-earth farmers living quiet lives dedicated to producing their singular cheeses. These attitudes have a certain basis in historical fact, but as Grasseni so carefully documents, in a global marketplace seeking the next “real” food, authenticity is fraught with complications and contradictions. In Stanford's detailed analysis of the creation of an indigenous cuisine for a broader public consumption, we see cultural stereotypes repeatedly invoked in order to define and make attractive a “cuisine” previously embedded in the lifestyles of marginalized populations. To make it comprehensible to tourists and international officials, the food must be defined in relation to something else—a fundamentally cultural process. Invoking its indigenous roots and mobilizing emerging sentiments of protest against global food allows the creation of an indigenous cuisine suitable for public display and consumption; highlighting through competition individual dishes that conform to broader expectations of palatability further marginalizes the foods relative to the cuisine from which they are extracted.

## Conclusion

Going forward, the value and importance of continuing to examine marginal foods lies in the network of interweaving themes we can explore for any marginal food. The contributors to this volume have demonstrated clearly that marginality can reveal important dynamics about people's relations to food. A central task for anyone trekking into this intellectual terrain will be to explicate the relevant actors, processes, and outcomes, as the authors here have done so well. Being clear on why a food is or has become marginal necessarily requires us to attend to processes and interactions, thus helping us understand the dynamics of change. It is here we see cultural dynamics at play; from here it will be important to examine the local-level phenomenon in larger contexts. While detailed ethnographic study is important, indeed central, the development of explanations that aid us more broadly is what makes it all so interesting and worthwhile. If we are going to concern ourselves with marginal foods, we need to investigate why they are marginal and why they become more or less marginal. There are at least three ways we can do that: (1) As all the authors do here, we can explicate in detail the processes that drive the change; this is the minimum that must be done before either of the following two options can be pursued. (2) As Wilk shows, we can attempt to link to existing theory and frameworks to explain and frame what we see "on the ground." Drawing on Bourdieu is interesting both as a test of Bourdieu's theories and as a useful framework to examine the kinds of discrepancies and changes Wilk discovered. (3) The dynamics around marginality of food provide us with important opportunities to understand larger processes, perhaps in ways few other aspects of society can.

## Notes

1. I use the term *process* sensu Bourdieu's "practice" (1977) or Giddens's "structuration" (1979), meaning we can understand the kinds of dynamics portrayed in these papers only through a consideration of the macro-level *structure* that conditions or frames, but does not define, people's actions and responses and their impact on the broader structural forces; it is the dynamics of each case that yields larger insights.

2. Vaneker demonstrates that discussions around authenticity and "ownership" of a food can also emerge in internal discussions among local actors.

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