

Food, Drink and Identity

Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe Since the Middle Ages

**Edited by
Peter Scholliers**



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Contents

Notes on Contributors	vii
Foreword	xi
Part I: Overture	
1 Meals, Food Narratives, and Sentiments of Belonging in Past and Present <i>Peter Scholliers</i>	3
2 Commensality and Social Morphology: An Essay of Typology <i>Claude Grignon</i>	23
Part II: Class and Group Identities	
3 Upholding Status: The Diet of a Noble Family in Early Nineteenth-Century La Mancha <i>Carmen Sarasúa</i>	37
4 Promise of More. The Rhetoric of (Food) Consumption in a Society Searching for Itself: West Germany in the 1950s <i>Michael Wildt</i>	63
5 Identification Process at Work: Virtues of the Italian Working-Class Diet in the First Half of the Twentieth Century <i>Paolo Sorcinelli</i>	81
6 A Bourgeois Good? Sugar, Norms of Consumption and the Labouring Classes in Nineteenth-Century France <i>Martin Bruegel</i>	99
7 Old People, Alcohol and Identity in Europe, 1300–1700 <i>A. Lynn Martin</i>	119

Contents

Part III: National Identities

8	The National Nutrition Exhibition: A New Nutritional Narrative in Norway in the 1930s <i>Inger Johanne Lyngø</i>	141
9	Wine, Champagne and the Making of French Identity in the Belle Epoque <i>Kolleen M. Guy</i>	163
10	Reading Food Riots: Scarcity, Abundance and National Identity <i>Amy Bentley</i>	179
11	French Bread and Algerian Wine: Conflicting Identities in French Algeria <i>Willy Jansen</i>	195
	Index	219

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Notes on Contributors

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Foreword

The idea of this book emerged during the bi-annual colloquium of the *International Committee of Research into European Food History*, Aberdeen 1997, where the participants frequently savoured salmon and visited an old whisky distillery, allegedly two culinary signs of Scottishness. Would food and drink have served as identity markers in other places and times too? Ten food researchers, with widely varying interests and traditions, tackle this question enthusiastically by writing original chapters for this book, which leads the reader from the fourteenth to the twentieth centuries, and from Norway to Spain.

This book exists because of the efforts of many people. First, I wish to thank the authors who dealt obstinately with many comments and suggestions, made by both the editor and an anonymous referee. Second, I wish to thank the anonymous referee for the attentive and critical reading of the manuscript, which proved to be very useful. Third, Frank Winter corrected the English of the non-native speakers: it is an enjoyable experience to work with someone who does much more than merely correcting texts. Finally, I wish to thank Berg Publishers for the patience and support, and in particular Maike Bohn and Kathryn Earle.

It is unusual for an editor to dedicate a volume which does not just cover his or her work alone. However, the making of this book was closely interwoven with a long difficult time for me and my family. Reading chapters interfered with visits to doctors and therapists due to the illness and convalescence of my younger daughter. Her admirable strength, together with the wonderful support of my elder daughter, made work and life (again) possible for my wife and me. Hence, it is to Sarah and Cassandra that I wish to dedicate this book.

Peter Scholliers
Brussels

Part I
Overture

Meals, Food Narratives, and Sentiments of Belonging in Past and Present

Peter Scholliers

A Starter: Some Meditations on Gastronomy

Allow me to introduce the general theme of this book by referring to a moment of my personal history. In 1968, I was fifteen years old, I lived in Brussels and I was desperately seeking to affirm my personality. Medium-long hair, dark clothes, left-wing sympathies, and a lively interest in rock music seemed to provide possibilities to count me in with both nearby (hip school friends) and more distant groups (Amsterdam *provos*). The thing that definitely gave me a special status was my ardent rejection of red meat due to an intense aversion to its smell and flavour, as well as rebellion against my parents' attempts to make me eat it. My father opposed me more fiercely than my mother did (today, I wonder whether this was a purely individual reaction or whether it was part of his view of how to raise a son, in other words, of masculinity). I needed to justify myself again and again, not only to my close relatives but also to a large number of people in various situations (friends and their parents, trips, parties, school). My attitude was given the erroneous but (to me, at least) attractive name of vegetarianism. Appropriate literature and contacts with congenial people provided me with arguments that included political, dietetic, economic and philosophical ones. This struggle was hard because red meat was highly valued in my immediate and wider milieu (by the way, my grandfather had been a butcher), and it had formed part of my family's daily behaviour ever since I could remember.¹ Little by little, my vegetarianism positioned me more clearly: it gave me a particular status in the eyes of others and in my own eyes.

With this very personal introductory note I wish to illustrate the role of food in the representation and identity of a person, and to stress that this process operates through various media: the individual, a close and a distant group of declared peers, a 'contrasting' group, and a mixed group of remote mediators that includes teachers, journalists, scientists and other producers of ideology. Definitely, the relationship between food and identity is a complex one.

This relationship is caught under its simplest form by the saying 'You are what you eat', quoted by many food researchers, sometimes under the form of the

pertinent question 'if we are what we eat, who are we' (Gabaccia, 1998, p. 9), or in its geographical version 'we are where we eat' (Bell and Valentine, 1997). Although in some cases food delineates the 'I', the 'us' and the 'them' very clearly (for example, in *kosher* food), this saying is surely a far-reaching, simplistic and imperious allegation.² True, its simplicity has been and still is attractive in identifying the peoples of the world. For instance, in his *La nouvelle Héloïse*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau suggested that 'one may find an indication of the nature of people in the food they prefer', and he went on to characterise the Italians, the Swiss, the British and the French according to their taste for, successively, vegetables, dairy products, meat, and wine (cited in Bourre, 1990, pp. 43–4). Similarly, the Irish were called 'potato people' by the English in the nineteenth century, and the Sicilians were named 'macaroni eaters' by Northern Italians in the sixteenth century. Today, such accordance of nation with food is convenient in promoting one's own country on the cultural world map (for instance, the resistance by the *Francogastrie* against the alleged *macdonaldisation* of France: Pitte, 1991; Fischler, 1996). And, let's admit it, we all tend to identify other countries with food.³ Surely, such direct and comprehensive assimilation between food and (national) identity should be questioned.

Let me come back to my personal history to explore somewhat further this relationship. In my milieu, vegetarianism was exceptional in the late 1960s: how did it tempt me, and where did it come from? I first reacted against a meat-eating culture and ditto education, and it was only in a later phase that I turned to other foodstuffs that were new to me (*genuine* vegetarian recipes). Also, it was in this later phase that my version of vegetarianism somewhat influenced my family's food habits. By opposing to a 'food regime' a *new* food regime emerged directly from the *old* one, maintaining some features of it (I would have the sauce, but not the meat). This indicates that diet and identity are not 'given' or just 'out there' ready to grab, but that both are interpreted, adapted or rejected according to one's needs, means and intentions. Thus, the extent of identification is significant. As a fifteen year old I found that food operated as a perfect vehicle for my identification with a group or, at least, with my perception of that group, but I would not have called myself a vegetarian all of the time, nor would other people have done so. Other values and (self) representations did matter, and I must admit (with a hot dog in my hand at a football game) that at times these overruled my anti-meat attitude.

So, can food operate as the sole factor in the process of identification of a group or an entire nation? Or does food have its place within a broader set of values (linked to religion, age or occupation), of which some are closely tied to the diet (for example, 'impure', 'healthy' or 'fancy' food), while others have no link to food whatsoever? Is the position of food flexible, or on the contrary, continuously pivotal (or trivial) in identity formation? This is an intricate but, I think, important

question. Consider, for example, religions' classification of foods as edible and non-edible by means of very severe, codified norms: Muslims should not consume pork or alcohol, Catholics should not eat meat on Friday, Jews should separate milk and meat, and Hindus should not touch cow meat. Transgressing these norms would imply punishment and even exclusion. What, then, should one think of the following violation: when in 1720 the Ottoman ambassador, Mehmed efendi, visited France, French observers noted that the ambassador strictly forbade his servants to drink wine, but that he himself enjoyed a glass of wine in secret, while his retinue (including his son) drank wine in public, of which the ambassador did not disapprove (Mehmed, 1981, 229). This example makes me wonder about the strength of norms with regard to food classification, the group's cohesion and its acceptance of transgressions, social discrimination vis-à-vis food norms, and the temporal and spatial dimension of these norms. If food is indeed a factor of importance in the formation of identity, what role does it play exactly, how does it relate to other values, and does it hold a constant position?

Such questions led me to invite historians, sociologists and anthropologists to explore the way in which identities were built, interpreted, negotiated, narrated and altered by means of food. Quite intentionally, this book takes the reader to a great variety of times and places. It could not be otherwise: diverse research traditions (involving methods, approaches, sources) are necessary in order to investigate the complexity of the theme, to consider various settings, periods and situations, in short to discuss and interpret judiciously the significance of eating and drinking in identity formation. It seems appropriate now to look briefly at the notion and the importance of identity: does it really matter?

One's Place in the World

Nowadays, social psychologists view identity as a person's own definition in terms of group membership, which entails intergroup behaviour, or the identification of a person with the norms, ideals and manners of a group (Turner, 1999). Notably, identities are constructed through differences with others (Hall, 1996, pp. 4–5), and the aim is to achieve collective self-esteem and group solidarity. According to the degree of commitment to a group, there may be total identification or only in part (Doosje et al, 1999, pp. 86–7). Social theorists claim that 'identity' is crucial to all people: it allows one to situate oneself and the Other, to give a sense to existence, and to order the world; it forges norms and values.⁴ Identity contributes to how individuals and groups perceive and construct society, how they give meaning, and how they (re)act, think, vote, socialise, buy, rejoice, perceive, work, eat, judge or relax. They do so by referring to economic, social, cultural and political conditions, events and expectations, and, while doing so, they affect the economic, the social, the cultural and the political (Ruano-Borbalan, 1998, pp. 1–13; Woodward, 1997, pp. 13–5).

Since the mid-1980s, this notion of identity has come resolutely to the fore in virtually all social research aimed at explaining present-day transformations of society. It is argued that the breakdown of traditional forms of identity (such as nation, family, class) has led to a search for new forms (such as region, friends, groups), which would account for identity crises and social and political commotions of various intensities (Du Gay, 1996, p. 1). Historical research has used this 'identity crisis' to explain the emergence and decline of strong national feelings (e.g. Haupt, 1996), and recently historians have connected identity to ethnicity, gender, and occupation as well. 'Identity' seems to be well on its way to acquiring a significant position in the spectrum of conceptual tools for studying the past and present.⁵

Nonetheless, it is a problematic concept. Social researchers have discerned diverse types of identities, while different theories have been confronted with one another. One distinction refers to 'primary' and 'secondary' identities, the former associated with an identity that is rather more stable and community-based (e.g. the family), and the latter with an identity that is flexible and with precise aims, often institutionally based (e.g. a political party, an occupation, a football club). The 'secondary' group may comprise several identities (Lipiansky, 1998, pp. 148–9). Such views suggest a hierarchy with a 'real' (given) and a 'constructed' (manipulatable) identity. Yet, some theorists argue that it is impossible to make distinctions. Identities are always multiple, and they form the synthesis of various categories (Dortier, 1998, pp. 51–6). Especially the latter view implies flexibility. By using identity strategies or tactics,⁶ people may want to adopt a new identity while discarding an older one. Other theorists warn against confusion between identity and 'role': roles (such as political sympathy, or football fan) merely organise functions of people, while identity provides meaning, and therefore frames the roles. Identity relates, for example, to nationalism or ethnicity (Castells, 1999, pp. 7–11).

To avoid this complexity and confusion, it may be preferable to concentrate on the notion of *identification*. Identification is more than just sharing the common characteristics of a group or an ideal; it is a never-ending process of construction, or even a 'fantasy of incorporation' (Hall, 1996, p. 2). In this view, identification operates through language and practice, or more appropriately because of the interconnection between language and practice, through discourse (as used by M. Foucault) and narratives (in the sense of how people think, tell and write about [their] lives). Through language, people internalise the attitudes of a group (Du Gay, 1996, p. 29), and they integrate and explain experiences, memories and expectations (Valentine, 1999, pp. 495–6). This may happen very consciously and publicly (for example, a gang of youngsters calling themselves 'The Jets', using slang and graffiti), or unconsciously (for example, the self-evident utilisation of the categories 'workers', 'yuppies' or 'France'). Implicitly or explicitly, this implies judgements. Through practice, people participate vividly in the attitudes and rituals

of the group (Ruano-Borbalan, 1998, p. 3). Again, this may happen very consciously, openly and in a socially controlled manner (e.g. the mineworkers' annual celebration in most European mining communities), or on a more automatic, evident basis (for example, church attendance). Both language and practice combine in a process of learning, which is of course crucial in early phases of life but which never stops (Chiva, 1996, pp. 15–9). Discourse and narratives allow people to define, recognise, interpret, negotiate, assimilate, reject, delineate and exclude, and hence, contribute to identifying themselves and others, in a constant dialectical process between the self and the other.

Feelings of Belonging, and Food

How does food fit within processes of identification, and how has this relationship been approached? In the 1960s and 1970s Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas stressed the role of food as signifier, classifier and identity builder. Giving sense to the world, and the ordering of people and events, operate through elementary, everyday practices to which eating and drinking are utterly crucial (Woodward, 1997, pp. 29–35). 'Food anthropology' devoted itself to the study of food in relation to one's own group, to other groups and to the sacred and the gods. Although this research influenced studies where the idea of social demarcation through food was central, 'identity' remained marginal. Very generally, food sciences in the 1970s dealt with famine and poverty, food production and consumption, health implications, social distinction, and descriptive studies of feast meals (Mennell et al, 1992).

In the 1980s food studies underwent rapid development because of many changes occurring in the world of food itself, and because of the so-called cultural turn in the social sciences. A great variety of new themes was explored (taste, eating disorders, haute cuisine, elaborate social differences etc., to which the names of S. Mennell, C. Grignon or J. Goody can be linked). Similarly, as in the social sciences in general, the notion of identity was taken up, to which food was directly and intimately linked. This is strongly supported by the claim that sentiments of belonging via food do not only include the act of classification and consumption, but also the preparation, the organisation, the taboos, the company, the location, the pleasure, the time, the language, the symbols, the representation, the form, the meaning and the art of eating and drinking. This close connection between food and identity did not only emerge in academic circles, but also in wider spheres. An example of the latter is the labelling of a category of people that seem typical for the booming urban life in the 1980s and 1990s: the 'foodies' or well-to-do epicureans whose main activity involves eating at fashionable restaurants (Simmonds, 1990, pp. 130–2; Macintosh, 1996, p. 50). Another example is a magazine's affirmation of the loss of Belgium's national identity in the summer of 1999 due to cattlefeed and chickenfeed poisoning.⁷

The view of the close relationship between food and identity is summarised in Claude Fischler's article which opened with the confident statement that 'Food is central to our sense of identity' (Fischler, 1988, p. 275). Eating is of course a biological act, he argues, but it is much more than that. Food crosses the border between the 'outside' and the 'inside', and this 'principle of incorporation' touches upon the very nature of a person. This is why eating and drinking matter greatly to all people, and why, as reported in some cases of groups of migrants, people retain some food habits when language or other cultural expressions tend to be forgotten. This 'incorporation' is the basis of collective identity, Fischler continues. Because people *absorb* food, they seize the opportunity to demarcate their own and the other group. People eating similar food are trustworthy, good, familiar, and safe; but people eating unusual food give rise to feelings of distrust, suspicion and even disgust. Food taboos formalise to an extreme the position with regard to particular foods, hence the existence of a culinary classification and norms, which attribute to food and its eaters a given place in the world. Nevertheless, people

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Figure 1.1 'The cavern of the *Soleil d'Or*', painting by Henri Evenepoel (Nice 1872 – Paris 1899); oil on canvas, 1896 (Brussels Museum of Modern Art, inv. # 7668, Copyright IRPA-KIK Brussels). Popular commensality: drinking, talking and meeting in a (not so luxury) café of the Belle Epoque

being omnivores gives them the chance to innovate, experiment and adapt norms, willingly or not, consciously or not. For Fischler, the present-day alterations in the world of food (technologically as well as culturally) are causing a crisis of the identification with food ('What are we actually eating?') and, hence, a crisis of identity of the eater ('Who are we, then?'). This reasoning about the 'principle of incorporation' gains its full importance when it is well understood that eating is part of a system of classification and representation, and that it operates in the 'register of the imagination', which is why 'cooking helps to give food and its eaters a place in the world' (Fischler, 1988).

The close relationship between identification and food is to be found in an increasing number of recent sociological, anthropological, ethnographical, geographical, philosophical and gender studies (for example, Giachetti, 1996; Bell and Valentine, 1997; Caplan, 1997; Jansen, 1997; Kanafani-Zahar, 1997; Counihan and Kaplan, 1998; Korsmeyer, 1999; Lentz, 1999; Valentine, 1999; Wilk, 1999; Bernard, 2000 – this list is not exhaustive).⁸ These researchers have few doubts about the full assimilation of food with identity formation and conservation. Lentz sees food and drink as 'strong markers of social boundaries', Kanafani-Zahar discovers that 'social values circulate through bread', Korsmeyer writes that 'those who choose to eat together tacitly recognize their fellow eaters as saliently equal', while Valentine agrees with the 'evidence that food plays an important part in the production of "family" identities'.

However, other social researchers doubt this relationship. Alan Warde accepts that the vegetarian and the gourmet make a statement about themselves, but he argues that for most people food is a 'marginal way of expressing personal identity, and in any case, operates in much the same way as it did in earlier periods'. Food, he goes on, is just one of many ways by which to express identity, and, moreover, a minor one. Many people eat, and watch others eating, without any judgement. They care about sufficient, affordable and familiar food, and they are not preoccupied with visual signs of fashion and categorisation. Also, most people would not be able to decipher codes related to food, and would not know or care about *Beaujolais nouveau*. Hence, Warde concludes that 'there are limits to the capacity of food to express personal identity' (Warde, 1997, pp. 199–200). I think Warde is right in questioning the place and importance of food as an identity builder, and in stressing the functional aspect of food. With regard to the former, this volume hopes to investigate the contribution of food to identity formation in various cases rather than to degrade radically the role of food in it or to advance general affirmations. As regards the latter, I think that Warde underestimates the bond between use value and identity value. Many people's choice is inevitably formed socially through discourse and narratives (as argued above). Social demarcation and identification are present in 'simple', 'self-evident' and 'unconscious' matters, as was proposed by Lévi-Strauss, Douglas and, more recently, by Pierre Bourdieu

(1979, p. 448). So-called self-evident consumption and particularly food are relevant to people's identity even if they themselves pay little attention to it.⁹

Identity and Historical Food Studies

The above sociologists and anthropologists attended many historians' meetings, but I think that they were not always clearly understood by the historians. This may be linked to the hegemonic historical paradigm from, say, 1960 to 1990. In 1992 a survey of the historical writing on modern diets in various European countries was published (Teuteberg, 1992). For the previous thirty years it showed the dominance of studies dealing with production, prices, per capita consumption and calories. A large majority of food historians wished to contribute to major questions of social and economic history (for example, the debate on the standard of living during the Industrial Revolution). The chapter on French historiography is illustrative of this interest. Up to the early 1980s, French food historians dealt essentially with agrarian and starvation crises, and with the calculation of food intake in particular regions and institutions, both covered by the label of Fernand Braudel's *vie matérielle*. The 'psycho-social orientation', inspired by Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, reacted against the quantitative supremacy without much success (with the noteworthy exception of J.-P. Aron). In 1992, the author of the survey on France could mention only one, albeit prolific, representative of this direction: J.-L. Flandrin who concentrated on the history of taste and meals (Barlösius, 1992). In 1999 the same Flandrin presented a brief overview of French historical food research in which he deplored and condemned vehemently the enduring bias towards a deceptive quantitative approach (Flandrin, 1999, p. 19). An equally weak presence of cultural approaches may be found in most other countries which appeared in the 1992 survey (there were, of course, exceptions such as in Britain, Edward Thompson's attention to the moral dimension of food riots in England, or Stephen Mennell's study on taste). Perhaps significantly, the subject index of this book lacks an entry for 'identity', while 'calorie' has 13, 'budgets' 19 and 'prices' 15 entries.¹⁰

Deceptive or not, the quantitative study of food continues to entice (new) ardent supporters. For example, Claude and Christiane Grignon argue that quantitative methods are most appropriate to learning about trends in food consumption which include the evolution of taste (Grignon & Grignon, 1999). Of course, the cultural interest was not absent in history writing prior to 1990. Class inequality was described in terms of calories, cost and expenditures, and occasionally the cultural appeared in relation to sociable drinking or luxury food (respectively an early and a late example, Burnett, 1979 and Scholliers, 1993). Some studies were devoted entirely to feasting, drinking or gastronomy (for example, Aron, 1967; Brennan, 1988), while aristocratic and bourgeois culinary exploits have retained the interest

of historians for longer (for example, Bauer, 1967; Gottschalk, 1948). Many of these ‘cultural’ studies indicate eating and drinking as social signifiers, but the very notion of ‘identity formation’ with its connotations of (self) perception remains absent.

Historians became interested in the concept of identity in the second half of the 1990s. Some of them became familiar with the explicit claims of Lévi-Strauss, Douglas or Fischler with regard to the importance of food in identity formation. Two books with contributions by historians, sociologists and ethnologists may illustrate this.¹¹ In 1996 Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari edited a magnificent collection in which the notion of ‘cultural identity’ is present. Significantly, ‘identity’ comes to the fore from the moment the book considers confrontations between different ‘cultures’. This applies to the dichotomy ‘Barbarians’ (*le cru*) and ‘Romans’ (*le cuit*), and most explicitly to the encounter in the Middle Ages of the Christian Westerners with ‘others’ when food (and particularly pork, wine and bread) defined people more clearly than before (Flandrin & Montanari, 1996, pp. 319–22). Yet, although issues of social, religious, geographical and national demarcation are present throughout the whole book, ‘identity’ does not form a separate, consistent tool for historical understanding (for instance, the twenty-page subject index lacks an entry for *identité*). Conversely, in 1997 Hans-Jürgen Teuteberg, Gerhard Neumann and Alois Wierlacher published a collection in which ‘food’ and ‘identity’ are seen as Siamese twins. Its introduction frankly and unequivocally claims that ‘Speisen (. . .) zur Abgrenzung gesellschaftlicher Gruppen und Schichten (. . .) dienen’, while it affirms that the position of food in identity formation is simply pivotal (Teuteberg, Neumann & Wierlacher, 1997, p. 13). This collection opens with theoretical essays on the link between food and identity, while most of the empirical contributions focus on the role of eating and drinking in regional and national identities. Thus, gulash, Sachertorte and macaroni are intimately connected to Hungarians, Austrians and Italians (both within and outside their countries, and irrespective of the borders of these countries in previous centuries).

In both collections, the link between identity and food is implicit and, in general, without much controversy. The same goes for other recent historical food studies that make use of the term of identity (for example, Gabaccia, 1998; Schrover, 1999). These historians thoughtfully analyse food habits, and they often discover and designate common characteristics of peoples’ diet, preferences, taboos etc., thus constructing the identity of a group, a community or a nation. This is a legitimate way of studying the past, even if contemporaries themselves hardly noticed shared food habits. Here, it is the historian who defines social, national, gender, ethnic or other borders. Such a view, however, does not fit in with the social researchers’ concerns of sentiments of belonging, nor with their analyses of discourse and narrative, nor with questions about the precise role of food in peoples’

identity making. As far as I can tell, such concerns are quite new in historical research. Only few historians have looked at questions of how food was used to build identities in the past: some have interviewed people (Holm, 1997; Beyers, 1999), solicited a wide variety of written and iconographic sources, or have pleaded for the re-reading of ‘old’ sources (Flandrin, 1999, pp. 22, 29; Wildt, 1995, pp. 24, 27).¹² Michael Wildt very clearly opposes two approaches to the past, which concur with the two views on identity: he distinguishes a familiar approach ‘from the outside’ and an alternative ‘from within’. The latter openly defies the perspective ‘from the outside’, and wishes to examine the way people experienced daily practices, how they fabricated representations of food, and how a new language of consumption came into being (Wildt, 1995).

The Scope of this Book

This leads me to the specificity of this book. It opens with a chapter by Claude Grignon about eating and drinking in company, thus addressing a crucial issue of identity formation. ‘Inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ with regard to meals are refined practices that may forge and strengthen a group. He presents various types of commensality, and hence various meanings of eating together. To learn about the limits and the internal hierarchy of a group, he stresses the importance of studying who is eating with whom, where, when, why, who is inviting and what formality is used. Carmen Sarasúa provides an example of highly intimate, everyday commensality of a noble family of La Mancha around 1800. She addresses the question of class identity, by considering what the family ate, how much money was spent, and when particular food was eaten. She invokes the concept of honour with regard to the diet of this family: despite bankruptcy, it was a matter of status and self-representation to send servants daily to the market and the shops to purchase whatever (and whenever) the family wished to eat.

Michael Wildt too addresses the question of class identity. He shows the shaping of a new ‘food regime’ in Germany in the ‘long’ 1950s. The daily wish of workers’ families to eat abundantly as a sign of normality in the late 1940s concurred with the rhetoric of the retailers’ advertisements. In the early 1960s, this dialectical process became more complex (slim trend, exotic cuisine), which questions the likelihood of a distinct working-class identity in an ‘affluent society’. The strength of rhetoric is also shown in Paolo Sorcinelli’s chapter on the Italian working-class diet in the twentieth century. He considers the view of a large variety of actors in bourgeois, Fascist and ‘modern’ Italy, and he describes the way the Italian working classes were introduced to the virtues of a simple diet, and how persistent propaganda put bread right in the middle of this diet. The author shows a nice example of an attempt to use a specific food item as a means of identification with the ideal of a strong, unified nation: bread was presented as particularly well suited to Italian stomachs.

Sorcinelli concentrates on food consumption and actual calorie intake, and confronts this with the rhetoric ‘from above’. A similar approach is offered by Martin Bruegel in his chapter on sugar consumption in nineteenth-century France. He shows that the shift of sugar from a luxury to a commonly accepted commodity before the First World War owed a great deal to the campaign by the sugar lobby and the state against the ‘popular prejudice’ that regarded sugar as pointless. Bruegel concludes that the working-class resistance to sugar consumption imposed by bourgeois norms was an expression of working-class identity, which illustrates a negative connotation of a food item with identity formation. Of course, identification by means of food and drink also operates for groups other than social classes. An example is provided by Lynn Martin, who explores the bond between old age and alcohol drinking in England, France and Italy from circa 1300 to 1700. He surveys contemporaries’ perceptions of alcohol-drinking old men and women, and confronts these with the actual accessibility of alcohol. Martin stresses the portraying of the drinking old as a cultural and social construct that implied both praise and denigration, both understanding and condemnation. To him, alcohol was clearly a means by which to identify the elderly.

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Figure 1.2 ‘An evening’, painting by Frans Van Holder (Brussels 1881 – Geneva 1919); oil on canvas, 1912 (Brussels Museum of Modern Art, inv. # 4064, Copyright IRPA-KIK Brussels). Intimate commensality: after-dinner of a well-to-do family

Sorcinelli deals with the middle-class attempt to link the virtue of a simple diet to class identity, but he also touches upon the forging of national identity: the glorification of massive bread consumption not only incorporated the land labourers of Tuscany or Lazio into the working class, but would also fully integrate them into the Italian nation. Such multiple identity formation is a complex and enduring process. Inger Johanne Lyngø explores this in the case of the ‘modern’ Norwegian diet, about which she writes that it is not national in the sense of being Norwegian, but primarily in the sense of containing new scientific insights. She marks a climacteric moment of this national identity formation, the 1936 Oslo Nutrition exhibition, and analyses the creation of a national diet (symbolised by a glass of ‘pure, fresh, white milk’). This leads her to consider a wide variety of phenomena and developments, which include the exhibition’s buildings, the new hygienic requirements, agricultural performance, vitamins, and the response of the target groups. Lyngø shows conclusively that food and national identity constitute a highly complex relationship, which goes far beyond a simple identification of, in this case, ‘milk’ and ‘Norway’.

Would the connotation between ‘champagne’ and ‘France’ perhaps be more straightforward? Kolleen Guy uses a brief, but crucial episode circa 1910 to investigate this identification. ‘France’ was perhaps readily linked to ‘champagne’ throughout the world, but she shows that this identification caused great commotion within France. The blending of wines from different *pays*, and their imprecise naming jeopardised the fame of French products, which led to a big dispute about the legal delimitation of the Champagne region. This involved producers, Parliament, traders and consumers, and attempts to appropriate the French Revolution, to challenge the historic construct of ‘champagne’, and to rewrite the history of pre-1789 *terroirs*. Paradoxically, this fight about regional identity was embedded in the striving to maintain a strong and unified national identity. A very different contribution to national identity formation is presented by Amy Bentley. She focuses on open social conflict, by exploring the bond between food riots and food disturbances, particular foods and the latter’s significance for a nation. Since E.P. Thompson’s work, the role of a given food in riots has been well established. However, Bentley wishes to go beyond this, and she pleads for an in-depth exploration of the very food at the core of the disturbance, whether this is tea, milk, meat or onions. To her, food products in rioting possess a very strong symbolic meaning. Moving to the second half of the twentieth century, she evokes the example of Coca-Cola, which became a sign of American-ness first in the United States and later throughout the world: denying access to this soft drink, and thus denying identification with ‘America’, caused sit-ins and other forms of protest.

The contributions to this book confirm that matters of identity formation appear most clearly when two or more groups confront each other. Willy Jansen’s chapter on (French) Algeria illustrates this marvellously well. As a participating observer

and thus using her own experience (and narrative), she notes that French colonisation brought about a new type of bread, which led to a genuine conflict: traditional, home-made bread and modern factory-produced bread had quite distinct meanings with cultural, religious and gender entanglements. Naturally, she deals with other foods (pork) and drinks (alcohol) too. She focuses on the crisis and the changes that conflicting but co-existing food regimes brought about. Once again the complex link between food and identity appears: this is not a matter of simple identification, but it is a complicated, dialectical process of adaptation, rejection and interpretation. Conflictual identities appear in other chapters too. Martin presents the physicians' different views of old people drinking, Guy refers to a war between two wine-producing regions, both claiming the ownership of the 'champagne' label, and both fighting over issues of representations of their own and the other region. Bruegel studies the way the sugar lobby depicted the rejection of sugar by the *classe populaire*, while Sorcinelli surveys the perceptions and the attitudes towards food of successive state forms in Italy.

Such confrontations (in the above cases, between bourgeois representatives and the people; between regions; between the state and the working classes) are tightly linked to economic, social and ideological factors. I wish to emphasise that almost all chapters reveal underlying economic rationales (milk producers in Norway, sugar merchants in France, agricultural autarky in Italy, commercial interests in the Marne region, and so on), which all had links to discourse and narrative (to stick to the same examples, the 1936 Nutritional Exhibition, the proclamation of sugar as an excellent provider of energy, the presentation of a poor diet as an asset, the making of the myth of Dom Pérignon).

A more general conclusion to this book would relate to the way in which the authors have studied the past, and to the relevance of their approach. The book's subject tempted most of the authors to study the past 'from within', rather than to look at it as a distant, impartial observer 'from the outside'. Lyngø focuses on the 'web of narratives', Bentley advocates a 'Geertzian thick description' of food, Martin uses a huge volume of contemporaries' writings (from Michelangelo and Erasmus to Chaucer and More), while Bruegel relies extensively on contemporary texts by social observers, philanthropists and scientists; Guy applies 'close reading' of a report from a public hearing, Sorcinelli uses contemporary writings to analyse discourses, and Wildt confronts working-class families' accounts with the rhetoric of a big retailer's magazine and by stories of housewives. This is a striking feature, that undoubtedly creates a difference with many earlier historical food studies, and which indeed allows adequately the study of identification processes via food. Narrative, thick description and rhetoric are clearly present in this volume.

None of the authors define 'identity' a priori, nor would they verify a 'given' identity by means of food. Some adhere implicitly to a very broad view (à la Castells), where national identity is central but certainly not 'given'. Others put

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Figure 1.3 'At dawn', painting by Charles Hermans (Brussels 1839 – Menton 1924); oil on canvas, 1875 (Brussels Museum of Modern Art, inv. # 2812, Copyright IRPA-KIK Brussels). The painter depicts opposite social classes: well-to-do merrymakers leaving a luxury café, and encountering (young) labourers on their way to work

class, region or age at the centre of attention. Bruegel, Sarasúa and Wildt use social class as a conceptual tool, while Martin looks at the role of (old) age. Region is present in Guy's and Sarasúa's paper. Religion appears in Jansen's and (only briefly) in Sarasúa's paper, while ethnicity is present in Jansen's contribution and gender in Bentley's, Martin's and Wildt's. This enumeration shows the inevitability of multiple identity formation and, hence, the necessity to conceptualise cautiously and investigate empirically the formation of identity. Surely, this goes beyond food and drink.

All authors consider the relationship between food and identity without a dogmatic starting point, but with the intention of cautious, open study of a particular good, place or period. Underlying is the notion that this relationship should be investigated on each occasion. This approach leads to scepticism with regard to a constant close bond between food and identity. Jansen shows the limitations of bread as an identity marker in (French) Algeria, although she emphasises at length the symbolic and social significance of home-made bread. She also shows shifts

in appreciation between French and Arab bread according to different (cultural) situations, which illustrates the flexible role of food in identity-building. Bruegel demonstrates the changing significance of, and identification with, sugar in nineteenth-century France. Grignon's various types of commensality entail very different forms of eating and drinking and, hence, identification. He concludes that commensality is one of the techniques by which identity can be defined and maintained. Note the words 'one of the techniques' and 'can be defined', which shows that Grignon is judicious about the role of commensality and food in identity formation. In other words, there is more to this world than food.

A main conclusion of this book would therefore simply be that food does matter to identity formation, but that sweeping claims in this respect must be avoided. Would this not question the strong claims about identity and its role in giving sense to the world? If one accepts the existence of a close bond between 'identity' and 'food' on the one hand, while on the other hand some of the papers in this book show that people use and 'think' food in a flexible way, then I cannot but conclude that 'identity' is indeed adaptable and interpretable. This may lead to a reconceptualisation of the whole notion of identity and one's place in the world. Nonetheless, each contribution to this book does underline a bond between food and drink, and identity, albeit of various intensities. Sarasúa's noble household shows a very strong, stable bond between food and rural class identity, while Jansen's account of Algerian bread illustrates an adaptable, changeable bond. Historical empiricism, thus, refines the theorists' assumptions about the role of food in identity formation.

Food as a signifier of femininity and masculinity in the past is also tackled in this collection. Bentley stresses the very active role of women in food riots, and Jansen shows the gendered production of food, with its changes, and the ensuing and shifting social positions of men and women. Martin shows contemporaries' different valuations of old men and women drinking, and Wildt notices the reaction of women against the introduction of canned food in the 1950s, claiming that home-made preserves tasted much better; furthermore, he not only emphasises the attention a women's magazine paid to slimness, but he also deals with the emergence of the image (and the practice) of the 'modern housewife' in post-war Germany.

Finally, various authors implicitly suggest an alternative way of studying the standard of living in the past. The analysis of discourses and narratives, implying attention to both language and practice, provides ample information about people's perceptions of daily routines. Contemporaries described and judged, measured and estimated, painted and (later) photographed and filmed, commented on and condemned the way of living, the spending and earning, the meals and drinking, the feasts and snacks, plus all changes that have occurred in these domains. Almost all the papers in this book testify to perceptions by individuals and official bodies.

Thus, the sugar consumption of the French labouring classes, the use of bread in Algeria, the poor diet in Italy, a food with symbolic meaning that caused a riot, and the mass food consumption in post-1950 West Germany, all shed light on the standard and way of living in the past. Surely, such an approach differs entirely from the historians' construction of statistics of real wages, per capita food consumption or average calorie intake.

This book brings the reader from Oslo to La Mancha, via Rome to Algiers, and from the fourteenth to the twentieth centuries. This is an inexhaustible journey. To me, it has shown that food and identity construction have an intimate relationship in diverse times and places, and that most people were and are concerned with what they eat, what others eat, and how they see, classify and judge each other. I cannot help but end these introductory lines by referring to the words of J.-A. Brillat-Savarin, closely linking food to language (already observed by R. Barthes in the 1975 edition of *Physiologie du goût*). In only a few lines, Brillat-Savarin sketches the 'Origine du plaisir de la table', stressing that 'ces réunions [i.e. the collective meals], bornées d'abord aux relations les plus proches, se sont étendues peu à peu à celles de voisinage et d'amitié', thus directing the true core of the theme of this book. He then ends by writing that 'c'est pendant le repas que durent naître ou se perfectionner les langues, soit parce que c'était une occasion de rassemblement toujours renaissante, soit parce que le loisir qui accompagne et suit après le repas dispose naturellement à la confiance et à la loquacité' (Brillat-Savarin, 1839, p. 201). And undoubtedly, conversations were about the meal, thus stressing once again the close bond between eating, talking and sociability.

Notes

1. The high social value of red meat may have equalled that of France in the 1950s, as it appeared in Barthes' *Mythologies* (Barthes, 1970, pp. 77–9).
2. The original citation by J.-A. Brillat-Savarin (as well as L. Feuerbach's later version, *Der Mensch ist was er isst*) should of course be seen in its time, i.e. as an enthusiastic approach to food that was certainly not common in the nineteenth century (Korsmeyer, 1999, pp. 68–71).
3. There are plenty of examples: for the French, Italians are 'Macaronis', the Belgians 'fries-eaters', and the English 'Roastbeefs'; for the English, the French are 'Frogs', for the Belgians, the Dutch are 'Cheese-heads', for the Americans, the Germans are 'Krauts' and the British 'Limeys', and for many (including themselves) the French are '*baguette*-eaters'.

4. 'Identity' is close to 'ideology' in the sense used by Gramsci and Althusser (the unconscious and the self-evident structuring of people's interpretation of the world); as will be discussed below, 'identity' operates more through conscious processes.
5. A search in the 'Article data base' (ADB-catalogue, presenting on the Internet the content of almost 14,000 journals) shows a genuine hyperinflation of titles with the word 'Identity' since 1998.
6. Following M. de Certeau, 'tactics' would be suitable for people deciding at precise moments what to buy, watch, cook, say etc, while 'strategies' would be appropriate for institutional bodies generating power relations with the 'outside' (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix).
7. 'A country suffers food poisoning. Belgium's national identity has been struck a mortal blow by health scare', (*Spectator*, 12 June 1999, p. 25).
8. The ADB-catalogue contains 29 entries with both 'food' and 'identity', of which 16 were published in 1999, 7 in 1998 and the remaining 6 between 1995 and 1997.
9. To demonstrate his point, Warde gives the example of retired persons who are unable to distinguish expressions of individuality within youth cultures; this may be so, but at the same time the example merely confirms the clear identification of the 'us' and the 'Other'.
10. Yet the introduction to the book was certainly not blind to the function of 'social and cultural identification and group conformity' (Teuteberg, 1992, table 1.1., p. 5).
11. Monographs may be mentioned too: e.g. Jobse-van Putten (1995) who in her study of the history of the Dutch meal sees various functions of eating, including the 'identification function'.
12. J.-L. Flandrin advocates the use of 'new' sources such as menus, travel accounts, nutritional treatises and the like, while he pleads for the rereading of household budgets; M. Wildt used household budgets, interviews and a customer magazine.

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Commensality and Social Morphology: An Essay of Typology

Claude Grignon

Il marchese fece loro una gran festa, li condusse in un bel tinello, mise a tavola gli sposi, con Agnese e con la mercantessa; e prima di ritirarsi a pranzare altrove con don Abbondio, volle star lì un poco a far compagnia agl'invitati, e aiutò anzi a servirli. A nessuno verrà, spero, in testa di dire che sarebbe stata cosa più semplice fare addirittura una tavola sola. Ve l'ho dato per un brav'uomo, ma non per un originale, come si direbbe ora; v'ho detto ch'era umile, non già che fosse un portento d'umiltà. N'aveva quante ne bisognava per mettersi al di sotto di quella buona gente, ma non per istar loro in pari.

Alessandro Manzoni, *I promessi sposi*

The marquis gave them a great welcome; conducted them to an agreeable servant's hall, saw the bridal couple with Agnese and the merchant's widow to their seats; and before withdrawing to dine elsewhere with Don Abbondio, stayed for some time, mingling with the guests, even helping to wait on them. The thought has not occurred to you, I hope, that it would have been simpler to make up one single table. I have described him as an excellent man, but not as an eccentric, as they would say nowadays; I have said that he was humble, but not that he was a paragon of humility. He had enough to place himself beneath these good folk, but not enough to act as their equal.

Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed*

As is the case for the selection of sexual partners, norms which determine eating partners are essentially, in their very principle, restrictive and negative. Conscious preferences for food items depend on an implicit and preliminary definition of what is edible and what is inedible that differs from culture to culture and from one era to another, and on the interdicts, linked to beliefs, which prevent the consumption of such or such a food product. Conscious table manners depend on another prior pattern: we do not eat outside authorised and specific places and times. In exactly the same way, the choice of guests is made according to a preselection which excludes in advance, as “impossible” and “unthinkable”, in a word as taboo, the bearers (or non-bearers) of such and such characteristics.

Commensality has indeed “positive” aspects and effects, especially as regards social integration, but, as I will try to point out in this chapter, these aspects, although the most visible, are of minor importance. Consuming food and drinks together may no doubt activate and tighten internal solidarity; but it happens because commensality first allows the limits of the group to be redrawn, its internal hierarchies to be restored and if necessary to be redefined.¹ Thus, serious study has to be prevented from confusing, as is too often the case, commensality with conviviality, which is a result of the former, even if its euphoric manifestations are easier and more pleasant to describe.

Generally speaking, we can define commensality as a gathering aimed to accomplish in a collective way some material tasks and symbolic obligations linked to the satisfaction of a biological individual need. We probably have to consider separately the special case where the guest group does not emanate from a pre-existent group, but is by itself its own purpose and its own expression. This is the case at encounter commensalities, extemporaneous, short-lived or at least temporary (which, however, do not gather completely at random), like the company at table during a package tour, for example, the company of travellers at dinner around an inn’s common table (*table d’hôte*), or, more or less stable but more lasting, the informal groups of regular attendants who meet at the café, the restaurant or the bar. These forms of commensality have in common that they occur on the fringe of habitual social life, within its parentheses and its interstices.

Apart from this exception, commensality is a result and a manifestation of a pre-existing social group. The diversity of commensality types is itself a consequence of the great diversity of such groups. Indeed, groups can be based on naturalised social discriminations and classifications, according to age, gender or ethnic group (meals of draftees, more or less commemorative meals of all kinds of veterans, stag meals) as well as on voluntary associations, more or less militant, of a political or a religious nature; they can be grounded in birth (lineage or local origin), or in status and position in the social hierarchy. If some of these pre-existing groups are occasional and superficial, some others, on the contrary, are closely connected with the very principles of social organisation. This is the case for groups linked to family and kinship, for age and sex-based groups, local groups, groups linked to occupations, and, through occupation, to social status.

Thus, in order to study commensality, we have to study the divisions of society or, more precisely, the way society organises itself by dividing. The diversity of the types of commensality we observe in a given society depends, undoubtedly, on the peculiar characteristics of all the groups which compose it; but we should be able to begin to introduce some order into this diversity by starting from the general type of relationships between the divisions of the society concerned. We may suppose that the forms of commensality vary from one society to another according to its degree of hierarchisation, according to the distance which separates

the groups, and, above all, to the degree to which this gap can be crossed, whether they are dominated by segregation and repulsion or, on the contrary, by solidarity and the sense of social continuity (Bouglé, 1927, pp. 26–7). To study commensality is therefore to study social morphology, but in a particularly concrete way, easily within the reach of empirical work; in this case, group relationships take the practical shape of drink and food exchange, and of everything that is exchanged through this exchange.

Given the contrast between the universality of the phenomenon and the diversity of its shapes, we have, I think, to begin with an essay of typology. I shall therefore outline a reasoned inventory of commensality types. On the basis of this outline, some themes for feasible studies are described and some hypotheses are sketched. This first essay of clarification is probably oriented (and limited) by my own preoccupations: it is up to my colleagues in other disciplines, historians and anthropologists, to criticise and to broaden it.

Domestic Commensality, Institutional Commensality

Closer to the contemporary observer, the forms of domestic commensality of the present day, linked to family life and to private life, should not lead us to forget institutional commensality, an element of life and collective discipline in hospitals, nursing homes, barracks, jails, convents and boarding houses.

The forms of domestic commensality themselves vary a lot, being sometimes very far from the contemporary pattern of the nuclear family: separation versus commensality between masters and servants, parents and children, men to be served and servant-like wives; forms taken by this separation (distinct tables or rooms, the right to sit at the table, different meal times) and this hierarchy (rank around the table, precedence, particularly with regard to giving the signal for the beginning and the end of the meal).

In the case of the present-day Western family, the intensity of domestic commensality may be considered an indicator of the integration of the family group, of the degree to which the family life resists pressures from parents' occupations and children's schooling. From this point of view, the study of commensality relates to the study of the family group chronology in its relations to schedules prescribed from outside. To which extent are families of different types free to co-ordinate the schedules of their members, to define a family schedule? This can be measured by comparing the size of the company at table and the size of the household, by the rate of meals taken at home, particularly midday meals. It is also possible to analyse how this varies according to the size of the household, its position in the social hierarchy (occupation, income, qualification), the parents' occupational activities, the children's type and level of schooling, and the age of its adult members.

One of the essential aspects of commensality is no doubt the multiplicity of exchanges to which food gives rise. Upbringing is probably one of the essential functions, more or less explicit, of family commensality; the end of commensality (and cohabitation) with their parents, more or less early and progressive depending on countries and social status, is a decisive step towards independence for young people (Grignon, 1998; Grignon & Gruel, 1999).

Institutional commensality is characterised by the occlusion of the group, which is all the more severe as the enclosure of the institutions to which the partners belong is hermetic (one can be invited to the dining room [the “pot”] of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* but not to the Carmelite refectory). Hierarchical in its principle and dominated by the rule of the institution, this commensality reflects and reinforces the classifications, groupings and discriminations which the institution carries out according to gender, age (school), rank (army) and opposition of status (masters and pupils, guards and prisoners). Here again, these partitions probably vary in time and space (e.g. teachers eating separately or with their pupils; in the latter case, what is the meaning of “with”? in the same room, at the same table, at the same time?). Furthermore, to what extent and under which conditions, does it leave room for indigenous forms of commensality and exclusion?

Extra-domestic commensality of “free” people, i.e. people living alone or among their family, leading a private life outside any institution, takes place between the domestic and institutional types. In this case we still have to distinguish between commensality at work and leisure commensality (an opposition which coincides very much, at least in France, with the distinction between midday meal and evening meal). In fact, commensality at work is semi-institutional, as corporate restaurants, university restaurants and school refectories show (not long ago in France, we used to speak of *demi-pensionnaires* – “half boarders”). It results from the confrontation of, on the one hand, hierarchical classifications and constraints imposed by the institution (duration and organisation of work, schedule) and, on the other hand, popular demands and customs; and it is part of what is at stake in this confrontation. When the distance between the workplace and home makes coming back home for lunch impossible (Duveau, 1946; Perrot 1974), to what extent, under what conditions, in terms of what compensations, is this commensality accepted for want of something better? According to which criteria (for example, age, occupation, gender, geographical and professional background) do indigenous regroupings, solidarities and divisions appear? To what extent, and how, do they oppose or combine with the hierarchical classifications that the institution displays?

Even if popularised, ceremonious commensality of leisure is, at least in towns, of dominant origin, first aristocratic, then middle class. It appears directly linked to social segregation or even to social repulsion; its concern is not only to keep or to spread a strategic network of acquaintances, but to “keep up one’s position” by sharing in a system of mutual invitations which approves and attests membership

of the same level and in the same social world (the same “society”). More precisely, the position held by someone depends on the position of the guests and the invitations he may expect, on the position of those he invites and those who invite him. The strong and deep feeling of hierarchy and precedence is expressed in a minute etiquette, the strategic and honorific characteristics of exchanges in a conspicuous outbidding. Evidence, especially literary, abounds on that subject (from Balzac to Proust through Labiche, from J. Austen to E.M. Forster); unfortunately, this is not true, at least in France, of statistical sources. We know the incidence of invitations and its variations according to social position, but we do not know who invites whom (in terms of kinship, neighbourhood, occupation, and so on).

It is probably the case of “free” and lone people, like increasingly numerous single childless adults, that makes commensality’s function of social integration most visible. Lacking family life or at least life as a couple, such single people are condemned, especially at evening meals, in the absence of working commensality (for those who have one), to go out with friends, to seek the company of other lone people in meeting places, restaurants, bars and clubs. As an expression of the threat of social exclusion which hangs over them, fear of loneliness forces them to lead steadily and regularly (so to speak) a Bohemian life, which is all the more hazardous and probably pathogenic as the circle of old friends gets smaller. This condition may be tempered, however, for those who have some kin, by Sunday or festivity invitations from the extended family, where these invitees play marginal and dominated parts.

Everyday Commensality, Exceptional Commensality

Nature, function and meaning of commensality differ according to its association with an habitual or an exceptional meal. While commensality, in the first case, is linked to conditions of everyday life, and reduced to the nuclear family or to the close and usual circle of colleagues, in the second case it stretches out to the extended family and to the body of friends and acquaintances. Exceptional commensality corresponds to the high or stressed times of the annual calendar or of the life cycle: Sunday lunch (or Saturday dinner), Christmas, New Year’s day or Easter meals, celebration meals for births, comings of age, marriages, funerals. It also corresponds to life at work and to the professional career: meals or parties to celebrate success (exam, promotion) or departure, particularly for retirement, occasional “drinks”, special Friday lunches or apéritifs. From this large, intensive and remarkable commensality, one must distinguish a “weak” exceptional commensality, narrower and casual, which in some cases expresses a relaxation of the “stressed times” (vacations, weekend), in opposition to the tension of the “unstressed times” in everyday life.

Exceptional commensality has probably been studied much more than everyday commensality, not only because its descriptive efficiency is higher (at least when referring to the values of the literary description), but also because it is, by definition, much more memorable. Here as elsewhere, less frequent practices leave more traces, in archives as well as in learned or popular memory and imagery. Perhaps we should avoid emphasising once again the most selective practices at the expense of the most frequent ones. To compensate for this imbalance, we may introduce facts of everyday commensality into the study of social chronology and rhythm of meals (Aymard et al, 1993). The opposition between everyday and exceptional commensality does indeed rely upon the alternation of social rhythms, of high or stressed times and low or unstressed ones, the latter being the most frequent, the most lacking in rarity. If so-called ordinary life looks monotonous, it is not only because of its regularity but also because of its repetition; more precisely because it repeats itself continuously.

Everyday commensality also distinguishes itself from exceptional commensality in the nature of the constraints it suffers: external constraints to which private life has to submit, as, for example, work or school schedules, domestic constraints resulting from the type, size and age of the household, from the location and environment of the housing, its distance from school, work and shopping, from kinship, in short all the constraints associated with living conditions (which are by the same token a frame of life, as they define the limits and the spatial and temporal hallmarks of activities). The essential characteristic of these constraints is probably their stability, or in other words their viscosity, which reinforces the usual, fixed and unsurprising features of the practices they determine. They result from portentous choices, decisions, investments or antecedents, which condition the future durably and consequently they are difficult and costly to dismiss or to modify. On the basis of a minute reconstitution of schedules, everyday commensality is probably a good topic by which to study sociability and daily exchanges, the management of neighbourhood, kinship and work relations, to examine how the different social categories try to trim their living conditions, and to observe the types of arbitration by which they try to reconcile contradictory constraints and values; in short, it is a good topic by which to analyse the popular ingeniousness too often neglected until now or simply left to populist attempts at rehabilitation.

Segregative Commensality, Transgressive Commensality

Commensality can approve and express discontinuities that separate human groups as well as negotiate those discontinuities by temporarily and symbolically bringing together separated groups, even by confirming and reinforcing their opposition in the end. In the first case, which we may call segregative commensality, to meet for eating and drinking is a way to set up or to restore the group by closing it, a

way to assert or to strengthen a “We” by pointing out and rejecting, as symbols of otherness, the “not We”, strangers, rivals, enemies, superiors or inferiors. From this point of view, to include means first of all to exclude, to invite to avoid. Like other techniques of meeting, segregative commensality is a group technique and sometimes a group therapy, a way for the group to make itself visible and concrete to itself, and, first of all, to number its members, to register recruitments and defections, comers and goers. Segregative commensality is also, in the case of exceptional commensality, a means of scrutinising itself, of pointing out its divisions, its hierarchies, on occasion its antagonisms, of activating and reactivating its functioning, its internal life, i.e. the relationships of solidarity, competition, and even conflict between its members. Intake of approved food and drugs (alcohol and tobacco in Western cultures) enhances communicative exaltation, allowing a lowering of censure and reserve, a role played elsewhere by music or dance (often associated with exceptional commensality). The attention attracted by this in-group conviviality (and academic analyses generally do not fail to provide it) must not allow us forget that the group shows itself so freely to itself only because it is out of sight of strangers – what part of the memorable pleasure that the participants get from the meeting is due to the feeling of the deprivation of the “others” (who do not even know “what they are missing”).

The strong and ideally typical forms of segregative commensality are likely to be found in hierarchised and discontinuous societies, those in which hierarchisation is the very principle of structure and social life, and where this hierarchisation goes with social heterogeneity and repulsion, which render the distances between social universes impassable and the very idea of passing unthinkable. The most accomplished example of this is probably the type of commensality linked to the ancient Indian caste regime: the necessity for each caste to preserve its purity by preserving its food from the stain others may inflict, even in some cases, by hiding itself while eating.² It would be interesting to examine why these facts of alimentary shame are so rarely found in Western court societies, where the feeding habits of the king and higher orders are generally conspicuous (Aurell et al, 1990); perhaps the reason lies in the fact that alimentary shame is linked to the most exclusive and closed forms of commensality and, above all, to a high degree of social heterogeneity, which requires and preserves a minimum of respect for the autonomy of other groups (including the autonomy of the lowest caste). Where social repulsion gives place to social contempt which excuses dominant people from putting themselves under some restraint in the presence of the poor and the dominated, the shame of gluttony and, more generally, the feeling of alimentary shame would disappear, at the same time as this basic kind of social respect would give rise to conspicuousness. Besides, we should probably distinguish between conspicuous waste, the excess of which insults the poor without even thinking of it, from the redistributing ostentation of the nurturing king or the *euergete*.³

We may suppose that segregative commensality gets rarer and milder as it passes from caste-based societies to order-based ones (like the French ancien régime) and eventually to class-based societies, which are egalitarian, at least in their “central ideology” (Dumont, 1967). But, as shown by an exploratory study of restaurants reserved for leaders of French corporations, administrations and ministries⁴, segregative commensality is far from having disappeared from the contemporary French society. Far beyond the Palais de l’Elysée, the Hôtel Matignon, the Quai d’Orsay – the direct heirs of aristocratic spirit and court life – it spreads out to cover the *sous-préfectures* and even national research institutes. Directly linked to hierarchical position, or more exactly to rank, the highly selective access to these club-restaurants is one of the marks by which the upper elite of the central administration and corporate headquarters distinguishes itself from the common executives or civil servants. In association with other privileges (as, for example, the right to select a sub-elite of occasional guests and clients by an honorific process quite similar to the distribution of decorations) and with a system of precedence codified by a minute etiquette, at least in its most ceremonious and official forms, this process of formal selection contributes, in the same way as the examination system of the *Grandes Ecoles*, to break the continuum of hierarchisation, to transform differences of degree into differences of quality and nature. It would probably be interesting to compare the French case with the cases of other Western societies, either more aristocratic (in their principle), like the UK, or more democratic, like the USA. These traditional and strong forms of commensality are both conspicuous and, if not secret, then half-hidden. They are often associated with some more discrete forms of segregation, more respectful of egalitarian appearances: e.g. when top executives use the collective restaurant, but keep meeting each other at the same tables, or arrive later than their subordinates.

To these manifestations of dominant ethnocentrism, linked not to the caste itself, but to the caste spirit, the dominated classes oppose a reactive counter-ethnocentrism. As a dominated variation of strict, segregative hierarchical commensality, popular commensality is based partly on the opposition between “them” and “us”, i.e. on the reactive rejection, on the return back to the dominant of social exclusion and scorn (Hoggart, 1957). From this point of view, it is an expression of popular solidarity, but it also reflects the internal divisions, the horizontal stratification of the dominated classes and cultures, their diversity and atomisation, especially rivalries and antagonisms linked to gender, age, craft, and geographical origins (Cornaert, 1966).

Contrary to strict commensality, transgressing commensality plays upon oppositions between social groups and the borders which separate them. Ambivalence seems to be its essential characteristic. It is because it recognises these borders that it can temporarily and symbolically transgress them, providing an opportunity for establishing, in the neutralised and ritual parenthesis of a meal, a relation of

exchange. And it is by transgressing them that it contributes to recognising and maintaining them. Inviting a stranger is a confrontation, a reciprocal challenge, which allows each to test the other, on the basis of shared criteria, with an excessive offer of drink and food, and so to measure the other's value, physically as well as psychologically and morally. It also provides an opportunity to agree with the other on the terms of a possible conflict, and to overload the other with excessive honours, which, in the logic of conspicuous provocations and generous over-bidding, are potential affronts as well.⁵

Within hierarchical societies, one can find some extreme examples of transgressing commensality, like the "invitation au château" (invitation to the manor) or the political leader having lunch with the workers at the factory restaurant. In this case, too, the confrontation of superior and inferior, transgressing commensality features ambivalence and exceptionality. The dissymmetry of the relationship appears in the initiative of the invitation, which always belongs to the dominant (whether the inferior is guest or host; in the latter case, the invitation of the superior is always an auto-invitation, which the honoured hosts are not able to refuse). Without the exceptional presence of the dominant guest (or host), the meal would not be worthwhile. For such a meal to fulfil its honorific power and function, the dominant partner must present himself or herself in an authentic manner, be recognisable without any doubt, in short, make for a time a present of himself or herself, as a person, to the other guests. By the same token, on the other hand, he or she cannot share a meal with the common people without showing and recognising that he or she has the same needs and the same tastes, is subject to the same necessities, does not dislike or despise what is commonly liked and praised. Like other populist rituals (for example the "bain de foule" (flesh-pressing) or serial handshaking of electoral campaigns, another periodic ceremony), transgressing commensality belongs to the family of carnival rituals, which, through symbolic compensation and inversion, allow the ordinary order of things to be accepted anew and to resume.

The manifestations of commensality that we are familiar with usually seem pleasant and friendly, but the functions of commensality continue to be primordial and somewhat primitive. A peculiar case of predatory promiscuity, based on the collective consumption of goods exclusively reserved for the members of a group, commensality is one of the techniques by which identity – the feeling of fitting in with both a social and a mental category – can be defined and maintained. More or less demanding and explicit, the usual etiquette that codifies the suitable relations between dishes, circumstances and commensals not only makes clearer and more subtle the distinctions between relatives and neighbours, comrades, colleagues and friends, foreigners, allies and enemies, it also combines social transactions and demarcations between individuals and groups, "I" and "us", "us" and "them", with anthropological oppositions between the edible and the inedible, between men and animals.

Notes

The English version of this chapter was prepared with the help of Martin Bruegel and Michael Visser.

1. 'During archery tournaments, the losers, holding their unbent bows, receive from the winners a horn cup. They drink and expiate their defeat. Then the winners expiate their victory; it is their turn to drink, but in the investiture cup. The hierarchy once created, the solidarity is confirmed: everybody enters in communion by drinking around.' (Granet, 1988 [1929], p. 257)
2. 'To the orthodox Hindu, every caste which is not his, whatever it is, is in some way impure. And this feeling of latent repulsion will clearly manifest itself in some circumstances. For example, those who will not fear being touched by a man of another caste will nevertheless refuse to eat with him. One fear above all is that of being contaminated by food. Food can be shared only among people of the same caste: it cannot even be touched by a stranger. Sometimes the stranger can spoil it with just a look. If a pariah were to look inside a kitchen, every utensil would have to be broken (cf. Sonnerat). Jacquemont relates that at dinner time, he happened to disturb his servant's meal: "When he saw me coming, the Saïss shouted in a pitiful way: Sir, sir, if you please! Ah, sir, be careful, I am an Hindu, sir, an Hindu". He remarks that in his sepoy escort there are as many cooks, pots and fires as men. "I do not know whether they all belong to different castes: there are not two of them to eat together".' (Bouglé, 1927, pp. 26–7)
3. About euergetism (from the Greek *εὐεργεσία*: 'doing good deeds'), see Veyne, 1976.
4. Carried out under my direction by R. Kaplan in 1992.
5. About the ambivalence of commensality as a gift of food and drink, cf. M. Granet: 'Feudal carousings, principles of feoffment communions, begin with the offer of a cup, which is a gesture of challenge. Before fighting, we offer the enemy a cup. Let him fortify! We will stand up to him all the same! After the victory, they offer the looser a cup, because defeat has revealed him as a criminal who has to be constrained to clear out an evil virtue. But it is also to rehabilitate him by obliterating the past and to avoid a return of revenge by proposing a communion. [. . .] An invader appears: the first gesture we attempt is to offer him provisions, not to try to pacify him, on the contrary "to treat him as victim to be fattened". Tch'ou's army (536 BC) invades the territory of Wou. The Prince of Wou sends his own brother to carry the gift of food. To this provocation another provocation is given as answer. Tch'ou immediately prepares to sacrifice the messenger: his blood will serve to oil a war drum. A gift of food or drink has the value of a challenge which involves fate and binds destinies.' (Granet, 1988 [1929], p. 257)

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Part II
Class and Group Identities

Upholding Status: The Diet of a Noble Family in Early Nineteenth-Century La Mancha

Carmen Sarasúa

In the spring of 1807, the old marchioness of Cervera, doña María Theresa Miró, saw her family properties in Almagro legally constrained. Her husband had died years before, leaving her the remains of a still large patrimony (land with olive trees, cereal, vines, the mansion, the coach), and an immense amount of debt. To satisfy the claims of the many creditors, the judge appointed an official to administer the family budget. The estate (*la Casa*) still had some resources: tenants paid their rents annually, while olives, grapes, barley and wheat were harvested by the *jornaleros* (day labourers). Leaving the payment of the debts to the widow and sons of the old marquis of Cervera, however, would have been foolish. At that time, with French troops poised to enter Spain, and a new society ahead, this family represented to perfection the lifestyle of the old Spanish aristocracy: living off the old family patrimony, arrogantly despising the possibilities of increasing it through improvements on their land, and stubbornly making expenses well beyond their economic means. Bankrupted probably decades before, they had been borrowing money from town officials and merchants, some of whom were holding in pledge pieces of the family's silverware.

The dramatic situation of the Casa de Cervera was not exceptional for the Spanish nobility in the eighteenth century. What is exceptional is the document left by order of the judicial administrator, a day-to-day record of the expenses of the Casa for almost two years. In this chapter, social identity will be explored by taking advantage of this source. In the first part, the diet of the Cervera family is described by quantifying each food item for the two years, introducing variables such as price, amount, and seasonal fluctuations in order to account for the structure of food consumption. In the second part, their diet is interpreted in terms of the family's social identity: if, on the one hand, the Cerveras were at the top of the social hierarchy in Almagro, in the broader context of Spanish nobility they were nothing more than a rural and impoverished noble family, very distant from the circles of real political and economic power, and hence from the modern and cosmopolitan trends and tastes developing in Madrid, Cádiz or other cities. The contrast between their local privileged position, sustained by tradition, and their

marginality within the nobility of the time, are reflected in the food they bought, preferred and consumed.

The document starts on June 1st, 1807, and ends on March 26th, 1809, the day before the marchioness died, covering a total of 22 months (665 days). It was written (with some difficulties) and signed by Vicente Rubio, probably a butler, who referred to the marchioness as *mi señora doña Teresa*, and to the administrator as *señor Don Francisco Alejandro de Chaves, administrador judicial, de caudales y rentas de Doña María Theresa Miró* (judicial administrator of properties and interests).¹ It is a daily record of expenses, listed in a column on the left, and the prices paid for them, listed on the right (see Figure 3.1). The daily number of items recorded varies between 15 and 20, the large majority of which are food; it also includes cleaning items such as soap, pottery for the kitchen, firewood, pharmaceutical products, and payments for various works such as building repairs.

The first problem arising when trying to study large landholders' food consumption through sources of this type (internal records of expenses) is to define which part of their consumption was satisfied by their own production. The absence of bread, olive oil, wine or meat cannot be interpreted as the absence of these products in the family's diet, but rather as the estate's capacity to satisfy domestic demand for these products: as food producers themselves, they would purchase in the market only the products they were not producing. Thus, a daily record of the food purchased would represent only *part of the total daily consumption*, leaving self-production unrecorded.²

The Cervera estate produced cereal (wheat and barley), grapes and olives, but did not operate as a rural factory, producing and marketing olive oil, wine, or flour (a very modest exception being a pig and some poultry being raised at the dependencies of the Casa). The documents show that the Casa de Cervera's workers were harvesting olives, wheat, barley and grapes in the very same months that olive oil, bread and flour, grapes and wine were being purchased for family consumption. This can be explained by two elements: first, the Cervera's crops were sold immediately after harvesting, instead of being transported to warehouses or olive mills to be processed, and then marketed. This means that the Cerveras were not among the successful ecclesiastical and civil landowners acting as agricultural entrepreneurs in Almagro.³ Second, the judicial constraint included the mandatory sale of the entire production, withholding the resulting income in order to pay the debts, and payment of domestic expenditures after authorising and checking them. The origin of the Cervera document is therefore not internal accounting, but a judicial constraint that ordered that every entry and every charge be registered. This suggests that the difference between food purchased (as recorded in the document) and food actually consumed by the family was minimal, limited to gifts or exchanges, and the document can therefore be considered an excellent source by which to learn about the family's diet, its seasonal variation, and to

**TO VIEW THIS FIGURE PLEASE REFER TO THE
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Figure 3.1 Page from the account books of the noble family. Each day started with registering three pounds of meat ('carnero tres libras').

what extent seasonal supply and prices shaped the family's pattern of food consumption. The document gives only indirect indications (discussed below) as to who had access to the food, in other words, on the distribution of the food among family and non-family members.

Almagro: Agriculture and Herding

In 1807, Almagro was a town in decline, but still enjoying the rank of *ciudad*, testimony to its past political and economic power. Belonging to the military Order of Calatrava since the Reconquest, Spanish monarchs had always been interested in consolidating the population and the military strength of the region, for centuries in the border with the Muslim territory. Donations to the nobility, military orders and the church were central to the strategy of attracting powerful families. Almagro's magnificent palaces and spectacular urban design are explained by the arrival, in the sixteenth century, of the Fuggers and many Flemish families, after Emperor Charles V had granted them, for decades his bankers and main creditors, the right to administer the income of the Calatrava Order, including the mercury mines of Almadén (near Almagro) in compensation for the immense debts that could not be repaid.

By the mid-eighteenth century, when minister Ensenada organised the land registry which was to be the basis for the first tax on wealth, Almagro had almost 9,000 inhabitants; it was the site of a Jesuit college, of wealthy male and female convents, and the home town of powerful noble families. Until 1827 it was the capital of the province of Ciudad Real. Travellers through La Mancha mentioned large extents of unploughed land. In 1752, only 40 per cent of the surface of Campo de Calatrava (the territory to which Almagro belonged) was ploughed; grass, mountains and wasteland accounted for the remainder. The reason for this is that the region's main source of wealth had traditionally been livestock. Almagro was part of the Castilian plains where the famous Merino sheep originated. Since the Middle Ages, herding had been 'a major source of income for the landed elite, and it furnished supplementary income for the resource-poor agrarian economy as a whole, providing employment and producing raw materials for local textile industries' (Rahn Phillips, 1982, p. 776).

Once in the Manchegan plain, a traveller might look in all directions without seeing a hill, a gully, or even a sign of human habitation. The climate too was given to extremes, unlike the temperate south. Isolated by its mountainous borders, the plain of La Mancha experienced cold winters, very hot summers, and a notable lack of precipitation. The discerning traveller, nonetheless, could appreciate the real and potential sources of wealth behind La Mancha's desolate exterior. The soil was very hospitable to vines, grain and olive trees, and natural grasses flourished on all but the worst lands. In addition, La Mancha was the southern terminus for several of the famous sheep walks of Castile, where herds of the Mesta were put out to autumn and winter pasture (Rahn Phillips, 1979, p. 4).

Traditional specialisation in herding explains why La Mancha's arable land amounted to only 28 per cent of the total in the eighteenth century, when the median for Castile was 46 per cent. In the mid-eighteenth century, Almagro's secular and

ecclesiastical proprietors declared 2,621 horses, 1,210 pigs, 1,136 goats, and 26,571 sheep. At the end of the century, herding was in decline due to the loss of the international wool market,⁴ but it still explained the region's wealth to a large extent (or, better, the immense wealth of the region's landowners), and some of the features of the local nobility's diet.

But if the region's land was mostly devoted to herding, the situation was different in Almagro, where 86 per cent of the land was ploughed (of which 48 per cent was devoted to grain, 15 per cent to vines plus olives, and 17 per cent to herding, and 6 per cent irrigated). This was due to two developments: in the first place, land owned by ecclesiastical and noble landholders was increasingly put into cultivation due to increasing returns from crops. A shift had taken place in the food supply to Madrid, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when most suppliers were from Northern Castile, to the eighteenth century, when La Mancha became the most important supplier to the Madrid market, particularly of wine (Ringrose, 1996, p. 202). Its location near the main road connecting Madrid and the southern seaports made transport prices of commodities from La Mancha competitive. By the mid-eighteenth century, this had resulted in a growing specialisation in commercial crops, such as olives and, particularly, vines.⁵ Furthermore, this strategy allowed large landholders to avoid the risks of cereal growing. Wheat was a 'political' staple, and since 1766, when a violent uprising against rising prices of bread had occurred in Madrid, governments had decided to force massive sales of wheat to guarantee the capital's supply. Wheat-producing regions, Almagro among them, then suffered from high prices of bread themselves: daily workers and small tenants, the majority of Almagro's population, suffered in a double sense: rising bread prices and increasing land scarcity.

The second cause of the higher percentage of land cultivated in Almagro was demographic pressure. Land shortage, a traditional problem due to the property system, was further aggravated because of growing population. As a result, illegal ploughing of the land had become increasingly common in Almagro in the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1804, representatives of three villages asked for permission to plough the *dehesa* (enclosed pasture land) of Cabezas, 2,750 fanegas that the town council claimed to need because of the growing population:

Peasants had to rent land at high prices or too far away, in other villages; many of them had no other occupation, for lack of employment in these villages. Tenants lacked the means to pay the local taxes and to maintain their families. They ate bad food, and, as a consequence, disease had spread.

Although irrigated land was never higher than 7 per cent of the ploughed land, the economic importance of its production was very high. Irrigation was affordable for small peasants, since water was easily extracted from the subsoil: in 1753, the

cadaster recorded 5,000 mills for pumping up water in the lands around Almagro. This allowed small landholders to specialise in vegetable growing, an easily marketable production which provided part of the peasant population with some earnings, and with a poor but healthy and cheap diet: the abundant variety of vegetables purchased and eaten at the Cervera House were locally grown and sold.

Most of the land and livestock was owned by powerful ecclesiastical institutions and noble families. In the mid-eighteenth century, Almagro's main land- and livestock owner was the marquis of Valparaíso, whose social importance was not only due to his immense wealth, but also to his political power, being a minister of King Fernando VI (1746–1759). Heavily influenced by the reformist and enlightened ideas developing in Europe,⁶ his lifestyle was in all probability much influenced (as it was in almost every court in this period) by French taste and innovations. The figure of this modern, reformist noble with the largest fortune of the region, is important in understanding the relative position of other noble families of Almagro, and in particular the marchioness of Cervera a few decades later.

In this economic and social landscape, Doña Teresa Miró, marchioness de Cervera, widow, lived in her Altozano Street palace with her two sons, don Ygnazio and don Manuel Pérez de Guzmán. Very little is known about them, except that, in the first years of the nineteenth century, their Casa was bankrupted and they had important debts with different people of the town. Despite their financial ruin, they were still important landowners, a situation explained by the fact that the nobility's land could not be sold without royal authorisation. The document throws light on their lifestyle: the coach and the mules, domestic servants, and details of the different rooms of the palace – a patio with a well, a stable for the mules, a 'barley room' where the barley for the mules was stocked, a kitchen (whose mat was renewed), and coal was bought for the ironing. Items reflecting more personal needs of the family members appear as well: white-lead (*albayaalde*) was bought for the old marchioness, payments to the hairdresser who came every once in a while to cut her hair. About 95 per cent of all expenses were on food. And food was, indeed, not only a major source of expenses, but a source of pleasure, and a permanent expression of the social position of the family.

Some Unexpected Features in a Traditional Aristocratic Diet

By the quantity consumed, its daily presence on the table, and the money spent on it (43 per cent of the total food expenditure), meat was the most important food consumed by the Cervera family, almost the only source of animal protein, fish consumption being very low. It was, above all, and together with white bread, the most obvious sign of status, to the point of being consumed in amounts far beyond any healthy levels.⁷ Meats consumed were mutton, pork, poultry, game and fowl.

Mutton and poultry represented a similar percentage of the total expenditure on meat, and together they accounted for nearly 65 per cent.

Mutton represented 32.5 per cent of the total expenditure on meat; it was purchased in different ways: mutton chops (*chuletas*), minced mutton (*picadillo*), mutton for stuffing, sheep's trotters (*manos de macho*) and, on a few occasions, roast lamb (*cordero*). It is unclear in the book whether some types of meat were from mutton or pork: loin (*lomo*), brains (*sesos*), tongues (*lenguas*), chitterlings (*asadura*), liver (*hígado*), testicles (*criadillas*). In any case, these varieties appear only exceptionally, while the purchase of *tres libras y media de carnero* (three and a half pounds of mutton) opens the list of purchased items every day. Mutton was clearly the basis of the marchioness' family diet, but it was never the only meat of the day.

Poultry had a similar importance to mutton in total meat expenditure, despite the fact that it was not consumed as regularly. Chicken (*pollo*) consumption was seasonal, from June to October/November: during these months, two chickens were bought almost every day. Hens (*gallinas*) show a much more regular presence in the diet, and every month between seven and ten were purchased. Given the fact that they were locally produced, prices of both chicken and hens were quite stable, one chicken costing half the price of a hen.

Game and wildfowl represented 19.4 per cent of the total meat expenditure: partridges and young partridges (*perdices*, *perdigones*), pigeons and young pigeons (*palomas*, *pichones*), turtle-doves (*tórtolas*), chocha (*chorcha*), but only a little rabbit (*conejo*) was recorded. There seems to have been a regular fowl provider for the Casa, because in January 1808 a payment to the 'partridges' man' (*el tío de las perdices*), who had also brought some firewood, is recorded. Finally, pork represents 13.7 per cent of the total meat expenditure, appearing in different ways: ham (*jamón fresco*), fresh and old bacon (*tocino fresco*, *tocino añejo*), and, once, roast sucking pig (*guarrillo*).

The Cerveras pattern of meat consumption is consistent with a traditional Spanish pattern: wildfowl was abundant in the cereal-growing land of central and Southern Spain.⁸ Pigs bred in southern Spain were regarded as the best quality, being fed on acorn pastures, and their hams being cured during the winter in hilly, cold areas. Their consumption had spread since the constitution of a Catholic state at the end of the fifteenth century, being a symbol of Catholic faith since Muslims and Jews were not allowed their consumption by their religions. As for mutton, the traditional meat of wealthy tables, its presence is higher in Almagro, origin of some of the most important herds of Spain.⁹

Figure 3.2 shows the strategy followed by the Cervera family to assure themselves a varied consumption of meat throughout the year. Consumption of mutton is quite stable: it was purchased every day, and only during fasting periods (March and December) in reduced amounts. Poultry and wildfowl could not be purchased

with this regularity, since they arrived only seasonally at the market: a perfect complement emerged, then, with mutton being combined with poultry from June to November, and with wildfowl from November to June.

Related to poultry (reared and marketed by the same hands, always women) were eggs, another source of proteins. Eggs were consumed regularly around the year, their price suffering minor fluctuations also due to the seasonal character of their production.

Bread was the most important food item after meat, accounting for 18 per cent of the total food expenditure. Bread purchased by the Casa was of two qualities: the lower quality is called just bread (*pan*) or coarse bread (*pan basto*), whilst the best quality is called ‘white bread’ (*pan blanco*). Sometimes the bread is recorded by its origin, ‘from Carrión’, a town near Almagro specialising in bakery. Bakers from Carrión were also buyers of wheat from the Cervera estate. Figure 3.3 shows the consumption of the two qualities, and their prices. The amount of the two varieties consumed is very stable throughout the two years. In July 1808, prices of both varieties dropped after that year’s abundant harvest, which had a different impact on the two types of bread demand: white bread did not react to the price fall, while consumption of coarse bread first decreased (during harvest, most domestic workers ate in the fields), and then increased. White bread, the best quality

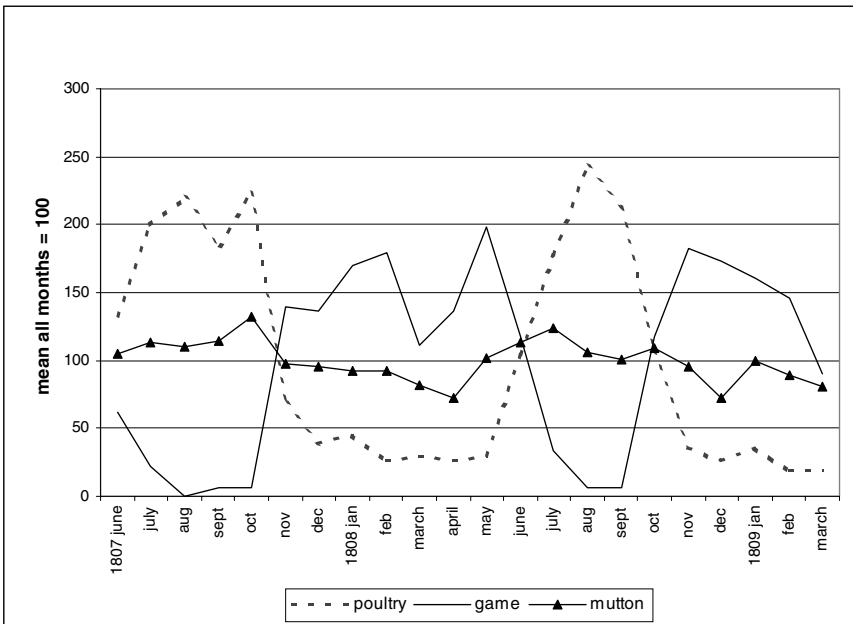


Figure 3.2 Consumption of mutton, game and poultry

and of higher price, was consumed by the family members: its demand is extremely stable and independent of price levels. Coarse bread, on the contrary, consumed by domestic and field servants, shows a dependency on price levels, its purchase increasing when the price fell.

The fact that bread was given daily to the estate's domestics is important in the light of social relations. Provision of wheat constituted a traditional problem for the region, and to solve it, or at least to prevent riots, a public granary (*Pósito*) had been created in the seventeenth century. In 1765 the deputy of Almagro wrote to the king: 'this town has little arable land, for which reason, even in years of plenty, its many inhabitants live off the bread that is brought daily for sale by various bakers of the region'. A year later, the town council insisted that 'the constitution of this town has always been to keep its inhabitants in food by the daily delivery of Bread that the neighbouring towns have voluntarily provided; suffering shortages of such precious stuff whenever an accident has impeded the said delivery'.

The importance of meat as a source of protein is greater due to the very minor presence of fish. Almagro is far from any seaport, and transport of fresh fish was difficult and very expensive. Traditional techniques for preserving fish, particularly salting, had solved this problem in part, as in large parts of Spain, making it possible to fulfil the Catholic precepts of fasting and meat abstinence. At the Casa de Cervera, meat consumption decreases, but it is far from disappearing on 'fish days'. This is consistent with different testimonies about the low level of conformity to

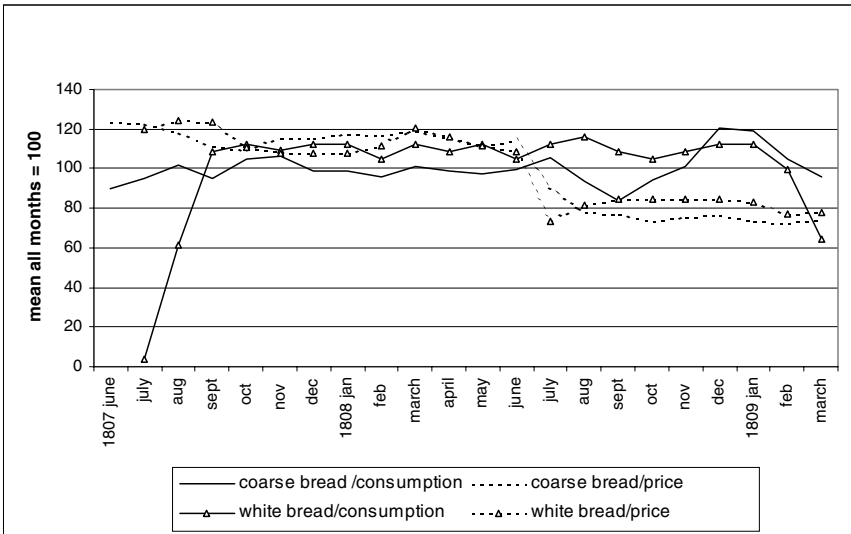


Figure 3.3 Consumption and price of coarse and white bread

this norm among the higher classes. Madame d'Aulnoy was surprised to see how easily this rule was ignored in seventeenth-century Madrid just by buying a papal bull:

Fish is very rare, being impossible to have fresh because it comes from the sea, which is more than eighty leagues' distance from Madrid. Sometimes they bring salmon, with which they make pies, which taste of spices and saffron. There is little river fish, but they find no difficulties in all this, because no one fasts, neither the lords nor the servants, because of the difficulties of so doing. They buy the papal bull at the Papal nuncio's house, and it costs fifteen *sous* of our currency.

The family of the marchioness of Cervera ate fish on fifty of the 665 days covered by the account book. Fish days are concentrated in two periods of the year, March-April (Eastern) and December-January (Christmas). The varieties of fish were very limited, and only four are mentioned: sardines on nine occasions, hake on seven occasions (almost all of them at Christmas), 'fishes', probably river fish, on two occasions. Cod amounted to 64 per cent of total expenditure on fish.¹⁰ Cod was purchased every month except in September, October and November, when almost no fish was eaten, and December, when it was replaced by hake and sardines. The pattern of fish consumption is simple: salted fish was the only available possibility of accomplishing the obligation of meat abstinence in most parts of Spain, and the consumption of salted sardines and cod is predictable. Exceptionally, recourse to fresh river fish was also a solution. Price seems to have played no significant role: cod is the fish most eaten, although sardines were half the price. What made this and other noble families' fish consumption really distinctive was Christmas hake. In 1807 and 1808, as probably every year before, some hake was bought. On 24 December 1808, 54 *maravedises* were paid for a 2-pound hake (that same day, a dozen eggs cost 30, and a hen 85).

Drinking hot chocolate in the morning or the afternoon had become a habit for well-to-do families in Spain since the sixteenth century, eventually entering urban common people's diet much later.¹¹ At the Casa de Cervera, chocolate was consumed with some irregularity. Figure 3.4 suggests two things: that its consumption was much higher before the judicial intervention initiated the regular control of expenses (the only food item in which a connection can be made between economic ruin and savings), and that chocolate consumption followed a seasonal rhythm: it was purchased/consumed more in winter months, and less in hot, summer months. In a regular month, four ounces (a quarter of a pound) was the amount usually bought, which on fast days doubled. Given that family members were probably four (and assuming that there were no guests), this meant one ounce each. On 23 June 1807, a month during which four ounces were bought almost every day, an entry says: 'half a pound was spent for being a fasting day'.

Chocolate time followed a ritual similar to that of tea time in England or coffee in France:¹² it was a social occasion on which families gathered together, with friends and visitors joining them; there were particular pots in which to make the chocolate (*chocolateras*), cups to drink it, and cakes to accompany it.¹³ The document reflects the importance of the ritual of chocolate time for noble families: the Cervera family spent 6 per cent of their total food expenditure on the purchase of chocolate, sugar, sponge cakes (*bizcochos*), fat (*sebo*), and pies. This equals the amount spent on fresh and dried fruits, twice the amount spent on vegetables, and six times the amount spent on fish. Chocolate represented 52 per cent of the 'sweet expenses', while 33 per cent was spent on very expensive biscuits (one pound cost between 64 and 68 *maravedises*), 8.7 per cent on cakes, 3.3 on sugar and 2.5 per cent on fat 'to spread on the cakes'. The cost of biscuits, cakes and fat together was higher than the cost of the chocolate: in May 1808, biscuits and cakes amounted to 80 per cent of the total expenses on 'sweets', chocolate representing the rest. References to the practice of eating cakes and biscuits appear in the writings of foreign travellers, and it is probable that the Arab tradition of mixing almonds with honey and spices, the type of sweets still common to all the Mediterranean world, was present in the sweets that the family of the marchioness of Cervera was so fond of.¹⁴ Sugar and cinnamon were other complements of the ritual, as was probably milk as well, although it appears very rarely, and whether it was from sheep or goats is impossible to know.

The use of fat 'to spread on the cakes' is revealing of one of the characteristic features of Spanish cuisine in this period: the absence of butter. Eighteenth-century reformers lamented the fact that even northern peasants, who had cow breeding as their main source of income, had failed to develop a butter industry similar to that of Northern Europe.¹⁵

So far, the diet fits the image of rich inland Spaniards in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: little fish, impressive amounts of meat, much white bread and sweets, particularly chocolate. But the accounts of the marchioness of Cervera contains some unexpected features. The family consumed very little wine, and ate lots of vegetables, including potatoes and dried vegetables, and fresh and dried fruits. These were low-cost, local products, whose consumption suggests a strong popular flavour in the Cerveras' tastes and preferences.

Vegetables were consumed as regularly as meat: a total of 23 different varieties around the year, and every day three to four were purchased: tomatoes, aubergines (*berenjena*), green peppers (*pimientos*), endive (*escarolas*), cabbage (*berza*, *repollo*), salad (*ensalada*), potatoes (*papas*), cucumber (*pepinos*), onions (*cebollas*), marrow (*calabacín*), artichokes (*alcachofa*), curly kale (*col*), thistle (*cardo*), chard (*acelga*), asparagus (*espárrago*), young lettuce (*lechuguino*), golden thistles (*cardillos*), lettuce (*lechuga*), turnip (*nabo*), spinach (*espinaca*), garlic (*ajo*). This abundance of vegetables is an unexpected feature of a noble family's diet, given

their traditional absence on the wealthiest tables. Fresh vegetables and fruits were almost totally absent from the royal family's diet in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Simón Palmer, 1982, p. 69). This is consistent with medical opinion of the time: Luis Lobera de Avila, a reputed physician, wrote in 1530: "the foods which are commonly hurtful to men are: garlic, onions, leeks, sprouts, aubergines (. . .) Fruits are usually not good (. . .) everything taken from the trees is bad" (ibid.). The attitude toward vegetables seemed to have changed somewhat in the eighteenth century, when cookery books, particularly the one published in 1763 by Martínez Montiño, royal chef of King Felipe III, included dishes in which vegetables accompanied meat, eggs and fish, and even some all-vegetable dishes.

In the Cervera accounts, vegetables are not exceptional foods, but normal parts of the daily diet, liked by the family and probably cooked following traditional, local recipes. Vegetables formed the basis of local cooking. Dishes such as *pisto manchego* (peppers, aubergines, onions, tomatoes, garlic and marrows, all diced and fried with olive oil) have for centuries been characteristic of the region. *Migas*, a shepherds' dish, consisting of pieces of old bread, fried with little pieces of bacon, lots of garlic, and red pepper and possibly other leftovers, also appears in the Cerveras book, as food for servants on special occasions. The rich local supply of vegetables, a characteristic feature of the local economy, explains not only the high local consumption, but also the fame of some of them throughout Spain: aubergines from Almagro (*berenjenas de Almagro*), prepared as semi-preserved, with vinegar and spices, could be purchased at most urban markets in Castile and Andalucía.

Vegetables were consumed according to a marked season: tomatoes and cucumber in summer, with aubergine and green peppers, plus onions and parsley, till October.¹⁶ Then, aubergines slowly disappeared, to be replaced by potatoes and endives. In autumn, vegetables and fresh salad were eaten every day. In November and December, tomatoes became scarcer, and potatoes, endives, curly kale, and thistle (still today a Christmas vegetable) appeared on the table. The variety was reduced in winter: potatoes accompanied by endives, thistles, curly kale, chard and sometimes asparagus.¹⁷ Tomatoes reappeared in June, together with marrow, cucumber, lettuce, and 'salad'.¹⁸ In summer the variety of vegetables and fruits was of course greater: on 22 August 1808, for instance, items purchased included three pounds of mutton, mutton chops, two chickens, bacon, chickpeas, three pieces of coarse bread, white bread, kidney beans, aubergines, tomatoes, peppers, melons, biscuits, salad and spices, eight eggs, three cooking pots and two cups.

The regular presence of potatoes as part of this noble family's diet deserves some attention. The first references to potatoes in Spain are from the mid-sixteenth century, when they were cultivated and consumed near Seville and sold at the Madrid market, as a result of the many *indianos* (wealthy former migrants to the

American colonies), used to the American products and tastes, living in these cities. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, potatoes were introduced into other parts of Spain, but their massive diffusion is thought to have taken place after the 1810s, as a means of compensating for the scarcity of grain caused by the disruption of the grain trade during the years of war against the French (López Linage, 1991). La Mancha was, together with the Canary Islands and Galicia, the region where potatoes were first introduced for human consumption, and was the origin of a local variety called *manchega* potato.

The Cervera document and further evidence from Almagro confirm that potatoes were well known in the region, and used for human consumption, at least from the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁹ A first-hand reference on the spread of potatoes in Almagro, some years before our document, is a letter published in *Semanario de agricultura y artes dirigido a los párrocos* (Weekly of agriculture and arts addressed to the priests), the main agricultural publication of the period (Díez, 1988). An enlightened priest, don Miguel López del Hoyo y Guerra, published in *Semanario* an enthusiastic article about the advantages of the new crop for human consumption, based on his experience in Almagro, where he lived: ‘Potatoes are used here to feed people, and bread has been made out of them frequently, and pies which turned out very well when half is made of wheat flour’. According to don Miguel López del Hoyo, two types of potatoes were cultivated in Almagro: *papas discretas* and *papas tontas* o *morunas*, ‘unknown here until fourteen or fifteen years ago, when they were brought from Murcia or Valencia’. The latter were planted by many in February and harvested in August, ‘and although they do not come out big, they are more worthy, since their harvest comes before the other’ (harvested from mid-October to mid-November). As this new type produced more, three fourths of all the land dedicated to potatoes were already planted with this type by the late eighteenth century.²⁰ The coexistence in Almagro of these two varieties, with different seasons, may explain the two types of potatoes (*papas buenas* and *papas ingertas*), bought by the Casa in October 1808, when the new crop was ready.

Potatoes did not replace other dried vegetables, but coexisted with them. Of the total food expenditure, 3 per cent was for dried vegetables, most of them chickpeas (*garbanzos*), consumed every month; kidney beans (*habichuelas*) and rice (*arroz*) appear as well regularly, while lentils appear just once. Chickpeas and kidney beans were local products, while rice was brought from Valencia.

To cook all these foods, to fry eggs or chops, to roast mutton or chicken, to prepare garlic sauce, to preserve the famous aubergines, to dress the salads, to prepare cold soups (*gazpacho*), *legumes* and vegetables, olive oil was basic. And even if the marchioness of Cervera was the owner of vast extents of land with olive trees, olive oil was regularly bought at her Casa, representing 4 per cent of the total food expenditure. Unlike fresh products, purchases of olive oil were

irregular: they amounted to between 1,200 and 1,300 *maravedises* every month until February 1808, when they totally disappeared for seven months; then olive oil was purchased again, now in higher amounts (1,800 *maravedises* in October 1808). This absence of olive oil purchases reflects one of the few instances of self-consumption of the Casa: February, the moment at which olive oil disappeared from the accounts, was when the olive harvest took place, suggesting that the estate was allowed by the judge to keep part of its own production, transformed into oil, and probably as olives as well (these were never recorded in the account book, although we know that they were much liked and consumed as appetizers at the time). This assumption is supported by the fact that in January and February the Casa paid the oliveskin-makers (*boteros*) for different oliveskins (*pellejos de aceite*), the recipients in which olive oil was transported and stored.

Consumption of fruit, fresh and dried, represented 6 per cent of the total food expenditure. Of this, 53 per cent was spent on fresh fruit, and 47 per cent on dried fruit. The marked seasonal consumption indicates that these replaced each other, compensating for the scarcity of one type with the abundance of the other. For example, in August and September, the two months in which the consumption of fresh fruit peaked, purchase of dried fruits dropped to zero. The reverse occurred in March and April 1808, when the expenditure on dried fruits peaked, at the moment when there were no purchases of fresh fruits. Eleven varieties of fresh fruits are recorded in the account book: melon (*melón*), grapes (*uvas*), water melon (*sandía*), pears (*pera*), plums (*ciruela*), apples (*manzana*), peaches (*melocotón*), oranges (*naranja*), mazzard cherries (*guinda* and *cereza*), and pomegranates (*granada*). Most of them seem to have been locally produced: according to the land registry, local fruit trees in the mid-eighteenth century included cherry trees (*guindo*), pear trees (*perales*), fig trees (*higueras*), almond trees (*almendros*) and quinces (*membrillos*). Oranges were probably the only non-local fruit.²¹ Dried fruits included hazelnuts (*avellana*), almonds (*almendras*), chestnuts (*castañas*), walnuts (*nueces*), acorns (*bellotas*) and raisins (*pasas*). Raisins appear almost always with hazelnuts. They were eaten particularly in fast periods.²²

The role played by spices, in a period when refrigerating techniques to preserve fresh food were almost unknown (and very expensive), was fundamental. Some spices helped to maintain the food, others simply masked the flavour. In any case, they were so essential that the spice trade flourished for centuries. Money spent on spices, salt and vinegar by the Cervera family amounted to 2 per cent of their total expenditure, of which two-thirds was spent on spices, 21 per cent on salt, and 13 per cent on vinegar. Spices purchased (frequently a purchase of undetermined 'especia' appeared) included cinnamon (*canela*), cayenne pepper (*pimentón*), ground pepper (*pimiento molido*), pepper (*pimienta*), hot pepper (*guindillas*), cumin (*cominos*), caraway (*alcarabea*) and cloves (*clavo*). Herbs included garlic (*ajos*), parsley (*perejil*), marjoram (*orégano*) and coriander (*cilantro*). They were purchased

daily, either from street vendors or at one of Almagro's spice shops, where American spices were sold. Spices were used with all food in Spain, as foreigners noticed.²³ In Southern Spain their variety was greater, and some of them, such as caraway, coriander, or cumin, were almost unknown in other parts of the country (Ríos and March, 1997). Spices represent a most characteristic feature of Spanish cuisine, and indeed of Spanish culture as a unique mix of Arab and American traditions.

Spices also had a very practical function: they were fundamental in the preparation and preservation of food. They were bought in great quantities every year on the occasion of the killing of the pigs: on 5 December 1808, a day before the pig butchers were paid, a massive purchase of spices is recorded: marjoram, cinnamon, pepper, salt, cloves, caraway, cumin and coriander. More salt, pepper and ground pepper had been bought in the days immediately preceding. Expenditure on spices doubled at the moment of the pig killing, which varied slightly every year.

There are some exceptional but interesting references to seeds and plants for healing purposes: mallow (*malva*), and *zaracazona*. As for vinegar, its use is characteristic of Manchego cooking: to prepare fresh vegetables, and meats, mixed with cumin, marjoram and garlic. Expenditure on vinegar disappeared in July 1808, probably because the Casa was consuming its own.

Two alcoholic beverages appear in the document: wine and spirits (*aguardiente*), both local in all likelihood. Their purchase amounted to 2 per cent of the total expenditure, of which 65 per cent was for wine and 35 per cent for *aguardiente*. This is a modest sum, suggesting a low consumption of wine, consistent with the testimony of foreign travellers in Southern Spain.²⁴ Wine was not only used as a drink, but also, as was the case with milk, as a medicine for people and, on special occasions, animals: it was used for three days 'to bathe the mule' that finally died. There are also references to its use for workers in the harvest season: 'wine for the straw carriers' is recorded in August 1807.

Milk was purchased only three times in the two years, probably when some member of the marchioness' family felt ill. It was either from goats or sheep, since there is no evidence of cows in these years. And finally, there was water. Although there was a well on the patio (whose repair is recorded), its water was probably of inferior quality, and thus used only for washing and cleaning. The accounts book recorded 'a load of water' every few days, drinking water that was carried from the fountain by the *aguador*, or water carrier, with the help of a donkey. When the marchioness died in 1809, and the last accounts were settled, the donkey was sold to the water carrier. This drinking water was not cheap, amounting to some 200 *maravedises* every month.

We know what this family ate. We can only imagine how and when it did. There was first a distinction between meat days and fish days, although dispensation from fasting was common. The influence of abstinence rules appeared through the consumption of fish at Easter and Christmas, the corresponding decrease in

meat consumption, and the increase of chocolate at these two times. Fish (cod) was not the only fasting food: in these weeks the combination of spinach and chickpeas or rice appeared, showing that the fasting pottage, or *potaje de vigilia* (often with boiled eggs) was cooked according to the same recipe still used today. Other clear distinctions appear at Christmas, with hake and roast pork or lamb. Other holidays, such as local festivities appeared less clearly: on 13 July 1808, a 'dole for the Virgen de las Nieves' (meaning probably the Virgin's hermitage) is recorded, but no particular food was then eaten.

The Casa as a Factory

The year at the Casa de Cervera was marked by the succession of agricultural seasons: the olive harvest in January-February, cereal harvest at the beginning of the summer, the wine harvest in September, and the killing of the pigs in November-December. These moments were expected by everyone in Almagro, workers and landowners, as they marked the peaks in the year's activity and the circulation of money in the town. For the family of the marchioness of Cervera, they meant much-needed money coming in, but at the same time important outgoings to be made in order to pay the workers' wages and other expenses: in May 1808, 900 *reales* were borrowed from the Royal Granary 'to cover the expenses of the harvest'.

Each of these seasons left its mark in the accounts: in the first weeks of the year, payments to the oliveskin-makers for the oliveskins to store the oil; barley, to feed the mules that pulled the coach, was stored in the 'barley room' for which a new key was ordered in January 1808, and payments were made to the men who piled the straw. But these activities occurred outside the house, on the land, and the wages and other expenses related to them were recorded elsewhere. What was entirely 'domestic' was the *matanza*, the pig-killing. In 1807, the *matanza* took place at the end of November and the preliminaries included buying a load of firewood, salt and lots of spices. Amounts 'to pay the pig killers' (*a los matadores*), who were given some spirits (*aguardiente*), were also recorded at the time. After the killing, the preparation of the different cuts of pork (sausages, hams) involved a lot of work for some days: a knife and more spices (ground pepper and marjoram), more firewood and cooking pots were recorded. Finally, the notice 'to other women who were in the *matanza* I gave them for their payment . . .' In 1808, the *matanza* followed an identical process, a ritual which persisted in most of rural Spain for centuries.

To prepare and cook the different cuts of pork, female servants and other female occasional helpers were needed. Many other aspects of a noble family lifestyle, however rural and impoverished it may have been, required people as well. And 'need' itself was not enough to account for the existence of domestic servants: the very fact of being a noble required some people in one's service, a living sign of

privileged social position. Evidence with regard to the marchioness' domestic servants is only indirect in the document, although establishing their presence is crucial to understanding how the food purchased was distributed and consumed. We have the working tools and objects that refer to domestic work (a broom for the stable, knives and cooking-pots for the kitchen, soap, starch, and 'a basket for the clothing', coal for the ironing, lime to whitewash the walls, the coach and the mules . . .); we have no payments made to outside workers, such as laundresses, which indicates that the laundry was done by permanent women servants. And there is more direct evidence: in 192 days (of the total of 665 recorded in the account), amounts corresponding to the 'lunch for the family' are recorded. 'Family' was the word to define the group of domestic servants (Sarasúa, 1994). Apparently, this reference follows no regularity: some months it appears three, five or seven days; but then there were months in which the number of days when lunch is given to the servants is always twenty-two, i.e. the months' working days excluding Saturdays and Sundays. This could indicate that these were not living-in servants, and that only when there was a particularly high workload (from May to September) they stayed the entire day, and therefore had lunch there and not at their homes. I do not know how many domestic servants were in this group: there were clearly women and men, given the strict gender definition of domestic tasks: women would cook and prepare the meals, wash, hang out and iron the clothes, whitewash the walls, attend the old marchioness, clean the house; men would feed and clean the mules and drive the coach, keep the boiler going; someone had to serve at table, buy and carry everyday the food consumed. There are references to some of them in other documents: among the buyers of grapes at the end of the vintage there were 'Patricio López, Vicente Rubio, Antonio Murcia, Pedro Nieto and Vicente Bermejo, criados de esta Casa'. The word used, *criado*, can be interpreted as domestic servant (and in fact Vicente Rubio is the person who writes the accounts every day), but also as outdoors workers.

Whatever days they stayed, the number of people seems to have been always the same, because the mean price paid for their lunches is very stable: between 16 and 19 *maravedises* each day. This is a very low sum; take for instance 5 June 1807, a month in which the 'family' eats lunch on twenty-two days. On that day, 15 *maravedises* were paid for the 'lunch for the family', while 85 were paid for a roast mutton leg, 60 for a pair of young pigeons, and 60 for 3 pounds of mutton. That same day, quantities similar to that paid for the servants' lunch served only to buy lettuces (13), 'half a dozen artichokes' (17), 'potatoes' (16). It can easily be deduced that when the servants ate at the house, their food consisted of cheap vegetables (plus coarse bread). On very special occasions, though, some meat was bought for their lunch, so unusual a practice that it was recorded: on two occasions in August 1807 one pound of mutton, and once in April 1808, one pound of liver. On September 1808, eggs for the servants' lunch were recorded as well.

The End of an Era, the Ruin of a Family

The first question posed by the document studied here is whether the diet of this noble family living in Southern Spain was representative of what is known today as the Mediterranean diet. Some of the features of the diet do indeed belong to this model, such as the high consumption (and wide variety) of fruits and vegetables throughout the year; and the use of olive oil instead of animal fat for cooking. However, the very high (and constant throughout the year) consumption of meat, introduces a contradictory and unexpected element: the fact is that the Catholic norm of fasting and meat abstinence had shaped eating behaviour only to a very limited extent. It is not only that meat could be replaced by eggs or vegetables, instead of the very expensive, and relatively scarce fish. As the case of this noble family shows, meat was simply not replaced: in the same days that fish was purchased and consumed, all kinds of meats were being purchased and consumed.

The second question is class identity. In food terms, social privilege means two things: quantity (eating or at least having plenty of food at one's disposal) at a time when most people were hungry for most of their lives, and quality (eating good-quality and expensive things). As in most parts of Europe in the eighteenth century, most of the Almagro population consisted of poor peasants, and scarcity of food was a constant feature of their lives. They ate very little, and what they ate was of poor quality. This means that the mere fact of buying all types of food every day was a strong signal of the privileged position of the marchioness' family. The second element of this class identity is the presence of particular items that expressed the consumer's economic and social importance: white bread, meat (in particular expensive meats, such as poultry, game, the best cuts of mutton, such as the loin, or the hams in the pork, and roasted pork or lamb, with which special holidays were celebrated, or unusual parts, such as the brains and tongues),²⁵ fresh fish, such as hake (which had to be transported from the coast); sweets, such as pies and cakes, bought at the bakery; and non-locally produced (hence, special) foods, including oranges and rice, cod, chocolate, sugar, cinnamon, and other spices, brought to Almagro from the seaports of Sevilla and Cádiz by the same muleteers who exported the lace made by Almagro lace-makers (Sarasúa, 1995).

Class privilege was expressed in ways other than eating particularly expensive things; it was also expressed by the time at which things were eaten. Only those who were not constricted by limited budgets could eat anything at any time. Living before the agricultural revolution, the marchioness of Cervera had to come to terms with the fact that seasons existed, and that plants and animals appeared and disappeared from the market following their own rhythms. Seasonal consumption is also a characteristic of poor people's food consumption, obliged to adapt their diet to whatever was cheaper at the market. It is possible to know whether seasonal food consumption by the marchioness' family was due to their efforts at saving or

to the constrictions imposed by nature by looking at price levels. Two conclusions can be deduced from this: first, changes in the consumption levels of products such as game or poultry occurred not because the demand was price-sensitive (that is, not because the family reduced their consumption in response to increasing prices, or increased it in response to falling prices), but because there was no supply during certain months of the year. Secondly, changes in the price levels of certain products had no effect on the family's consumption levels. Figure 3.4 shows the case of chocolate, a product whose demand would have been expected to be much reduced, had saving been a goal for this bankrupt family. Chocolate consumption underwent important fluctuations, but these were totally unconnected with price levels, which were extremely stable. Eating something regardless of price was the outer sign of privilege.

Conclusion

'Noble families' included very different levels of economic resources and lifestyles in Spain. The pattern of food consumption of the Cervera family is, indeed, very distant from that of the Almagro peasant. But it was also very distant from the urban, courtly nobility: the Cerveras consumed little wine (and no liquors), and some expensive non-local items, such as cheese and butter, honey or lemons, are completely absent;²⁶ they regularly consumed (cheap) vegetables, fruits and tubers such as potatoes, most of them locally produced; their diet followed the changing food supply at the local market; a seasonal influence that reflected a deep integration in rural life and its calendar.²⁷ The popular, local features included the cooking

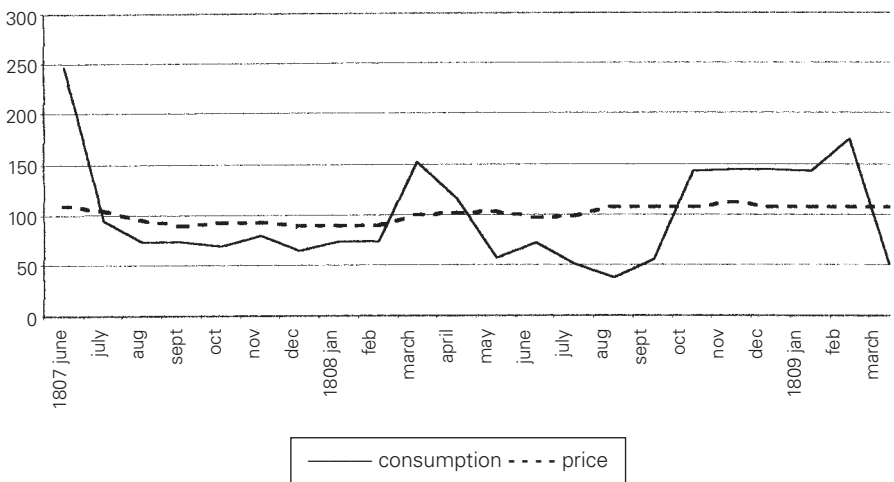


Figure 3.4 Consumption and price of chocolate

style, which clearly followed the local tastes and cooking traditions, as reflected in many scenes from *Don Quijote*. The social identity emerging from the diet of the marchioness of Cervera and her family represents a particular type of nobility, the traditional rural one, whose patterns of consumption combined the signs of their wealth and status with local features and tastes that differentiated them from the urban, courtly, sophisticated nobility.

The last element of identity emerging from the account books defines even better the type of nobility that the marchioness and her family belonged to. As late as the early nineteenth century, Spaniards still felt very strongly that thinking in terms of savings, making decisions in terms of profits, working harder in order to be richer, buying when it was cheaper, was simply dishonourable. For a noble family, this meant that expenses were dictated by honour, not by need or choice, and so they could not be questioned, or reduced. It also meant, above all, despising money, and everything related to it. The following statement seems very relevant of this particular attitude:

One thing deserving compassion is the disorder that exists in the houses of these great lords. Many of them do not want to go to their estates (that is how they call their lands, towns and castles), and spend their lives in Madrid, leaving everything in the hands of an intendant, who makes them believe what suits his own interests (. . .) It is not only in this that they make mistakes, but also in the daily expenditure of their Casas; they ignore what it means to make provision for what could be needed, they buy everything on trust, at the bakery, the butcher's, the rôtisserie, and so with others. They even do not know what these men write in their books, and whatever they give to them, never examine or refuse the accounts. There may be fifty horses in a stable lacking straw and oats, starving. And once the lord is in bed, should he fall sick during the night, they could not give him anything, because in the House's pantry there is no water, coal, nor candles, in short, absolutely nothing. Because even if they purchase strictly what is needed, servants take whatever is left to their homes, and so the next day new provisions have to be brought in (d'Aulnoy, 1986, p. 265).²⁸

The Cervera document shows not only what this noble family purchased at the market, but also how they did so; the fact that every day they purchased whatever they felt they wanted or needed to eat is more significant than the particular food they ate. The image of this family, officially bankrupt and with their patrimony judicially constrained, certain about the definitive loss of their old wealth, still sending their servants every day to the stalls to buy chocolate, hens, eggs, ham, unable to take decisions about the Casa's management, despising the possibility of storing or saving, refusing to reduce their expenses, is as dramatic as the end of the society they so well represented.

On 17 March 1808, with Murat marching towards Madrid and King Carlos IV and his prime minister Godoy planning their flight to France, a popular revolt

started in Aranjuez. In the following years, war against the French expressed the desire for freedom, as well the deep need for social change.²⁹ The modest accounting book recording the daily domestic purchases of the old marchioness of Cervera, tells us about the lifestyle of a social class that could no longer exist, a society that had to end.

Notes

1. In the last months the signature of a woman also appears, Josefa Zaias, the widow of judicial administrator Chaves, who had died weeks before the last accounts would have been settled. The document, entitled 'Gasto diario de la casa de la Sra Da Maria Theresa Miró', is in Archivo Municipal de Almagro (Ciudad Real), (box 'S. XIX, varios', No. 5529) unfortunately badly catalogued.
2. Studying the Auvergne nobility's food consumption, Charbonnier (1975, p. 472) noted that bread, fruit and vegetables were not recorded in the account books 'en raison de l'autoconsommation'.
3. Or at least not during these last years: the olive mill that appears among the properties constrained could indicate that the family had acted as food industrialists in the past (but they might have just rented it to someone else acting as such); in any case, the Casa buys regularly olive oil throughout the whole period covered by the 'book'.
4. This high degree of commercialisation was supported by the *Mesta*, the powerful organisation of sheep owners (Rahn Phillips, 1982, p. 32).
5. Local agricultural industries reflected local agricultural production: in 1752 there were 9 flour mills, 4 oil mills, and 3 liquor stills.
6. He was responsible for organising the stay in Spain, whilst working for the Crown, of the Irish scientist William Bowles (Sarrailh, 1957, p. 326).
7. In *El árbol de la ciencia*, Pío Baroja described a young doctor who arrived at his first professional appointment in La Mancha at the end of the nineteenth century. He is surprised to see that meat is still considered 'rich people's food', and as such, every day his landlady prepares meat. He dislikes this diet, with an excessive consumption of meat, and the absence of legumes, fish or vegetables, and tries to convince people of its unhealthiness.
8. In the last years of the seventeenth century, Madame d'Aulnoy wrote after crossing the French border: 'I have been advised to take great amounts of provisions with us so as to avoid dying of hunger in some places we have to go through; since hams and pork's tongues are famous in this country, I have given

orders to take a fair amount of them' (p. 55). In Burgos, Northern Castile, she tasted (and liked) lamb and partridges, although, like many foreign travellers, she noted the strong flavour of frying with olive oil: 'although lamb is very tender there, not everybody likes their way of frying it in boiling oil; because butter is extremely rare there. Partridges can be found in great quantities and they are very big' (D'Aulnoy, 1986, p. 99).

9. Mutton was not only the most abundant meat in Spain, but had been the most appreciated since the Middle Ages: 'Tous les traités du XVe ou du XVIe siècle s'accordent pour attribuer la palme, entre toutes les viandes, au mutton. Dès 1420, Juan de Avinon écrit que la viande de mouton est la plus noble des viandes d'animaux à quatre pattes. Au XVIe siècle, Luis Lobera de Avila et Juan Sorapan de Rieros expriment la même idée.' (Vincent, 1975, p. 451). In the early decades of the nineteenth century, mutton began to be replaced by veal and steak in the northern areas in which livestock was becoming a major specialisation, such as Galicia (Eiras Roel, 1975, p. 463, fn 5).
10. Cod had traditionally been fished in Atlantic waters, off the Grand Banks, by fishermen from Northern Spain. Formerly a French territory, Terranova became British after the Utrecht Treaty of 1713. Although the treaty recognised the traditional rights of Spanish fishermen to fish and salt the cod there, they were in fact prevented from doing so, and British fishermen were increasingly taking over the cod trade. By the mid-eighteenth century, with growing commercial and political rivalry with Britain, and a growing deficit in the balance of payments, cod imports became a political issue; political reformers advocated replacement of cod by different fish as 'fish days' staple, inspired by the French prohibition on imports of sardines from England in 1715 (Ulloa 1740, p. 150).
11. In late eighteenth-century Madrid it was occasionally offered to domestic servants as part of their wage (Sarasúa 1994, p. 217).
12. 'The wife of the town's governor ordered chocolate to be brought in, which she offered to me, and it cannot be denied that they do it better here than in France', wrote Madame d'Aulnoy during her stay in Vitoria, p. 63.
13. An *onza* (or 'ounce', slightly less than 30 gr.) per person was considered the regular daily consumption of chocolate, to the point that chocolate makers made chocolate tablets of one kilo weight, divided into two parts of a pound each, in turn divided into eight portions.
14. 'Merendamos at the princess' house (. . .) There was iced and hot chocolate, and another chocolate with milk and eggs. They take it with sponge cakes or rolls both dry and fried, which they make purposely' (d'Aulnoy, 1986, p. 243).
15. Butter was exceptional even in Madrid a century before: 'Thank God, Lent is over, and even if I fasted only during the Holy Week, time seemed to me much longer than what the entire Lent would have seemed to me in Paris,

because there is no butter here. The one we can find comes from over 30 leagues, wrapped like small sausages in hogs' casings, is full of worms and more expensive than butter from Vanvre. One has to put up with oil because it is excellent, but nobody likes it' (ibid, p. 252).

16. Items purchased on 1 September 1808, included: mutton three pounds, mutton chops, one pound of fresh bacon, two chickens, one hen, white and coarse bread, melons, 'fruit', chickpeas, cabbage, eggs, 'lunch for the family', peppers and tomatoes, salad and spices, and two loads of water.
17. On 12 January 1808, items purchased included: three pounds of mutton, two partridges, white and coarse bread, thistle, potatoes, olive oil, spices, hazelnuts, a load of water, soap, a load of firewood, biscuits, lunch for 'the family'.
18. On 22 June 1807 (a fish day), items purchased included: three and a half pounds of mutton, four coarse loaves, lettuces, potatoes, cod, 'lunch for the family', spices, hazelnuts, almonds, half a pound of biscuits, wine, a hen, kidney beans, half a dozen oranges, rice, two pounds of chickpeas, two pounds of mazzard cherries, soap.
19. In both cases, potatoes are referred to the original American word, *papas*, instead of the modern term in Spain, *patatas*, although this was already used in most late eighteenth-century texts.
20. *Semanario de agricultura*, tomo II, Madrid, 1797, pp. 307–8. *Orujo* is grape waste (or olive waste) after pressing. The liquor distilled from grape waste is also called *orujo*.
21. Oranges were highly priced and regarded as exquisite fruit. Madame d'Aulnoy wrote: 'Don Fernando de Toledo sent me wines and liquors, with a great quantity of confits and oranges' (d'Aulnoy, 1986, p. 50).
22. One century before, Court ladies were given 'on fast days one pound of dry fruits such as roasted hazelnuts, almonds, dates or raisins' (Simón Palmer, 1982, p. 93).
23. Madame d'Aulnoy complains on different occasions about the use of spices in Spanish cuisine: 'I was served a great dinner, which gallant Spaniards had had prepared for me, but everything was so full of garlic, saffron and spices, that I could barely eat anything' (d'Aulnoy, 1986, p. 41).
24. 'They economise wine extraordinarily. Women never drink it, and men in such tiny quantity, than half *quartillo* a day is enough for them' (ibid, p. 227). Leandro Fernández de Moratín, the most famous late eighteenth-century playwright, was shocked at the heavy use of alcoholic beverages by English gentlemen. He titled the seventh of his *Apuntaciones sueltas de Inglaterra* (Loose annotations about England) 'Drunkenness'.
25. According to Montanari (1997, p. 187), this was a transitional period for meat consumption in Europe: after being a basic food of the privileged classes for centuries, it suffered a progressive loss of prestige among the wealthy.

26. The absence of cheese is particularly noticeable since the famous manchego sheep's cheese already existed.
27. On 3 November 1808, the purchase is recorded of 'chestnuts of All Saints Day' (*castañas del día de los santos*).
28. 'Spaniards give their body-servants but fifteen escudos per month, with which they have to clothe and feed themselves (. . .) This is why they eat nothing but onions, peas and other vile species, and what makes pages rob more than magpies' (d'Aulnoy, 1986, p. 226).
29. Hunger and need increased in Almagro in the first decade of the nineteenth century, due to the disruption of agricultural and livestock production brought about by the French invasion and the war. In 1809 abandoned children were so numerous that the City Council hired fifty-six wet nurses to feed them. In 1815, 161 wet nurses were needed (Sánchez-López, 1993, p. 34).

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Promise of More. The Rhetoric of (Food) Consumption in a Society Searching for Itself: West Germany in the 1950s

Michael Wildt

Looking at Germany in 1945, no-one would have expected that only a decade later its western part would become a prosperous country and a democratic state eager to rejoin the international community of civilised nations. Indeed, the immediate post-war years were full of political, economic and moral chaos (Schwarz, 1990, p. 152). It was feared, then, that this chaos would lead to a second Weimar Republic with its catastrophic aftermath, and many longed for a modern, democratic and prosperous society. Full and downright assimilation to “western norms” would bring the desired objective within reach. This implied a change of social behaviour and values, which, according to R. Dahrendorf, would have to include for Germany the “pursuit of happiness” and “economic individualism” (Dahrendorf, 1961, p. 297). In this essay I wish to investigate to what extent the West-German attitude towards (food) consumption changed during the 1950s, and to what extent the rhetoric of (food) consumption revealed new social values and identities.

This chapter starts with a brief sketch of post-war Germany, emphasising the experience of destruction, hunger and deprivation after Allied bombing and military victories had put an end to the German feeling of invincibility. I shall then compare working-class food consumption with the semiotics of a shopping magazine from the late 1940s until the early 1960s. I deal particularly with the magazine’s recipe pages, so as to outline the development of consumer mentality in West Germany. *Die kluge Hausfrau* (“The Clever Housewife”) was published by one of the biggest grocery chains in Germany, *Edeka*, with a working-class clientele.¹ I compare this rhetoric with information from household budgets and from interviews that I have conducted. From 1949 up to now, a regular record of daily income, expenditure and consumption has been kept by some 200 working-class households.² In contrast to a macro perspective “from above”, I shall use the household budgets for a micro analysis of everyday consumption (Conrad & Triebel, 1985; Pierenkemper, 1991). The original household books have been destroyed with the one exception of those

from the regional board of Schleswig-Holstein. I shall use these documents to learn about the actual consumption of a specific working-class family. Here, let me introduce the Z family, consisting of four members, living in the port town of Kiel. The husband, born in 1924, worked as an engine fitter in the municipal gasworks; his wife – a year older than he was – was a housewife. With two little children, they lived in a single room and paid a monthly rent of 8 DM. It is unknown whether there was a kitchen or bathroom, but there was no garden. The family income depended on the wages of Mr Z, and often in the first half of the decade, these earnings were inadequate. Frequently, Mr and Mrs Z had to borrow money either from their parents or from banks (Wildt, 1994, p. 38–58).

This confrontation between the magazine's rhetoric with regard to food and the household's spending on food may help to reveal the changing mentality and identity of West Germany in the 1950s. In brief, this exercise will take us from the early-1950s sobriety of simple meals, to the late-1950s diversity of international cuisine, and to the 1960s abundance, when concerns about slimness and health started to prevail. All in all, food seems to have been continually in the fore in West Germany's search for identity in post-war Europe.

Black-market Experience, and Confidence in Good Money

Contrary to all National Socialist propaganda, Germany had never been able to provision itself. The supply of fats showed a shortage up to 50 per cent, and meat and dairy consumption were based on imports. At the beginning of the War, shortages on the “home front” were insignificant because plundering of the occupied countries had topped up the German diet. In 1943, however, after the defeat at Stalingrad and heavy Allied bombing, the supply situation deteriorated from week to week (Martin & Milward, 1985). The extent of the shortage manifested itself fully when the Third Reich ended and was divided into zones of occupation. Each zone had to fall back on its own territory, while the necessary supply of grain from the East slackened. As a result, supply in the West relied heavily on Allied imports, and without the grain shipped in from the USA and Canada, the German supply would have collapsed completely. The situation was aptly described by a leading official of the food administration as “living from ship to mouth” (Trittel, 1990; Gries, 1991).

Under such conditions it comes as no surprise that a parallel supply system should have existed alongside official rationing. As well as the legendary CARE parcels,³ several private foreign relief organisations took care primarily of children and the elderly. The daily free school meals financed by the British government, as a result of which schoolchildren were given a warm meal without ration coupons, were the best known (Stüber, 1984, p. 557–77). However, the most essential supply

of food outside the official rationing system was provided by the black market. Thousands from towns and cities bought fruit, vegetables, potatoes, butter, eggs or bacon in the surrounding countryside. Savings from the War and pre-war periods were, however, used up soon. Jewellery, coats or watches were used instead of money, but cigarettes became the leading currency on the black market (Wildt, 1986, pp.101–23). While the state rationing system, which served everyone, was under constant pressure, the illegal market could offer virtually everything to individuals, and it was an antisocial but efficient way to obtain necessary goods. Thus, during the post-war period the saying “Help yourself, and God will help you” became all too obvious. It may be said that the immediate post-war years were a schooling in the theory and practice of the free market.

The currency reform of June 1948 may be regarded as the real birth of the Federal Republic of Germany, one year before its official foundation in May 1949. With this reform, money regained its position and, as if out of the blue, the stores were full of goods again. Everything was now available . . . if one had new German Marks. This *miracle* happened only because farmers and shopkeepers had hoarded quantities of goods illegally in the months before the currency reform. This “created” good money in which everyone had confidence, even those too poor to buy the goods. It is from this period that the photos showing people pressing their noses against shop windows date: for many, these pictures constitute icons of West Germany.

“The full shop windows were really bad” says Mrs H, remembering the summer of 1948,

because prices were very, very high, if you consider that we had only 40 marks. And we didn’t have a pot to cook in, you had to pay 25 marks for a pot made of aluminium. They came from the aeroplanes at the time; pots and pans were made from those that were left [. . .] And in the following year, for the first time lamb was given at Easter. We were able to buy two pounds of roast lamb and cauliflower, without difficulties, with good money. And the shops now sold goods such as butter and eggs. You could buy cream, real liquid cream. And there was white flour, real white flour, it was beautiful. (Wildt, 1994, p. 33).⁴

At first, the displayed goods could only be admired because many people lacked the money to buy these *marvellous* things. Thus, if in the immediate post-war period West Germans worried primarily about food, clothing, footwear and missing relatives, after the currency reform their only concern was about money (Merritt & Merritt, 1970, pp. 16–8). In July 1948, 48 per cent of the people living in the US zone said that they lacked the means to buy the necessities, but in August this proportion had risen to 59 per cent (Stüber, 1984, p. 372; Buchheim, 1993).

Despite the hardships of currency reform, and despite increasing unemployment and the rising cost of living, the significance of the currency reform is inestimable

in the collective memory of West Germany. This reform was and is still seen as a turning point that promised a taste of wealth, as well as the certainty of being able to buy things for *good* money: from then on, life could only get better. “Normality” came back to the households after the years of scarcity, and people could afford *unusual* food items that had been lacking so long, such as butter, cream, coffee and white flour. Mrs O, born in 1928, and having grown up in a working-class family in Hamburg, immediately fulfilled a long-cherished desire after the currency reform:

With the first money I earned I went to a café and ordered a gigantic piece of cake. Now I could finally eat sweet things and buy cream gâteau. I had never learned to handle money. I was too young before the war. During the war and after money didn't have any value for me at all. Organising and exchanging were the only important things to do. And suddenly I had to learn to handle money carefully at the age of twenty! I think it took until today! (Wildt, 1994, p. 35)

The meaning of the currency reform is therefore not to be understood solely in terms of political categories or in discussion of its role with regard to the economic upswing after the War. Its decisive strength consisted of it symbolically ending the crisis period of the War and immediate post-war years. In this “society in ruins”, not only had millions of people been killed and houses destroyed, but familiar relationships and structures of everyday life had been crushed as well. Teenagers who had learned to survive in the ruins of their towns, men who had stormed Eastern Europe as “members of the master race”, and women who had had to concentrate all their strength on the home, had gone through an extreme experience. The desire to return to “normality” therefore determined the mentality of the late 1940s and 1950s in both West and East Germany.

A New Horizon after Years of Restraint

On weekdays in 1949, the expenditure of the Z family was limited to basic food-stuffs like milk, bread or fats, but at the weekend the shopping list clearly became longer. The weekly consumption of bread was considerable: as a rule, 4.5 kilos of rye bread were purchased. There was only 500 g of butter per week for the whole family, and as much margarine. Bread and butter with lean minced pork and liver sausages, cheese or jam were eaten on weekdays, alternating with fish (primarily herring and mackerel). On Sundays meat and dessert (particularly chocolate) were bought. Oranges, bananas and other luxury foods were purchased only seldom at this time. On special days, like Easter, the shopping list was considerably longer. Easter eggs were then part of the feast, as was home-baked cake. Mr and Mrs Z even allowed themselves a little real coffee: “50 g of pure coffee” was registered

on 14 April 1949. Only at Christmas did pure coffee appear in the housekeeping book again. Coffee substitute was drunk at all other times.

Die kluge Hausfrau introduced simple recipes immediately after the currency reform. In 1949, fats like butter or lard were a precious ingredient. The weekly culinary plan of *Die kluge Hausfrau* provided meat only in the form of mince, bacon or brawn on weekdays, while on Sundays “proper” meat was to be served. By Christmas 1949, baking of bread and pastry was still affected by the shortage. It was still an unusual feature, like the possibility of using lemons in the kitchen. A real “Dresdner Christstollen” (sweet yeast loaf with fruits and almonds) could therefore hardly be baked. The recipes of the early 1950s continued to bear traces of the forced thrift of the rationing period and of the use of substitutes in the preparation of daily meals. On the other hand, wonder at the beginning of “normality” and the possibility of obtaining an increasing number of products, also appeared at the time. Besides the narrow material limits, the recipes remained clearly inspired by a simple and local cuisine. Culinary extravagances or international dishes were absent from the recipe pages of these years. Mainly, these included tips with regard to careful spending (“the pumpkin is cheap”), or they introduced meals from various German regions. Thus, the limits to this magazine’s recipes after the currency reform are not just a materialist barometer (lack of financial resources), but also a sign of cultural poverty.

In 1950, coffee substitute was still part of the Zs’ shopping list, but dried eggs and artificial honey also appeared on the list. Contrary to the year before when this family had enjoyed coffee only at Christmas and Easter, it was now able to buy pure coffee each weekend. At Easter 1950, roast beef, which was particularly expensive, came onto the table. Moreover, there were sweets and chocolate, and orange jelly besides the usual jam. A common purchase for the weekend included fruit bread, milk, bread rolls, sliced cold meat, Gouda cheese, liver sausage, and salami. Carrots, leek, mince or inferior cuts of meat were bought for the Sunday meal. Of course, this is still far from a luxury menu, and fresh meat remained a Sunday occasion. However, all this pointed to gradual improvements, not with regard to the daily meal, but to meals at the weekend and on festive occasions. It is striking for this family’s preferences that great importance was devoted to the Sunday meal in spite of the times of relative scarcity in which every pfennig had to be counted.

Die kluge Hausfrau ended the year 1950 with a startling new feature: the magazine introduced a cold buffet and a hot punch for New Year’s Eve. The article shows that the editorial staff assumed that a buffet was unknown to its readers:

For the cold buffet on New Year’s Eve you clear your husband’s desk or the big table. A festive white tablecloth should be put on this. Shining red tomatoes, green parsley and salad provide simple but effective garnishing. In order to give everybody good access

to the buffet, a stack of plates should be on the table, as well as sufficient knives and forks. Most of the time, the guests can mingle and they shouldn't stick to a fixed seating order [. . .] able to talk only to the two neighbours when seated at the table. Of course, it has the great advantage to you as a housewife that you can prepare everything in advance, and you may find an hour of spare time before your guests arrive, so you can welcome them well-rested and resplendent: perhaps you'll have time for a quick nap, for a little make-up or just for a short rest in front of the open window.

I must emphasise that many terms that took on greater importance in later years were mentioned here: the “modern” meal with coloured, attractive garnishing, the sociability and the efficiency of a buffet dinner, the adroitness and the charm of the housewife.

In 1953 a highly charged concept turned up for the first time on the magazine's recipe pages: rapidity. “No time today! Every housewife knows one day on which the preparation of the meal must go particularly quickly because it's wash-day or because of an unexpected visit. Egg dishes, for example, will satisfy a demanding eater in no time.” In this text, rapidity is not yet a genuine virtue: it is presented especially to cope with an exhausting week. Needless to say, washing machines were not in evidence in working-class households in those days. Washing remained an arduous and time-consuming business, which left the hardworking housewife no choice but to cook “fast” food. However, in 1953 rapidity was not a sign of modernity, nor a sign of modern, time-saving cuisine; it was presented as an aid to help the housewife in managing the enormous daily housework.

The daily shopping list of the Z family had changed noticeably by 1953, i.e. only five years after the monetary reform! On one Friday in March, butter, margarine, “fine” bread, vanilla pudding, jam, Edam cheese, tea and pure coffee were purchased. Oranges were bought at least once a week. The home-made cake was still part of the Sunday meal, but quite frequently cake was also bought at the baker's. Significantly in the light of its scarcity and high value in previous years, pure coffee now gradually became part of everyday consumption; bought quantities increased, and coffee was no longer a privilege on festive occasions. I must stress another innovation that may seem trivial but that is quite significant to me. In the housekeeping book of the Zs', “margarine” or “palm oil” were no longer written down as such, but brand names like “Sanella”, “Rama” or “Palmin” appeared. For me, this characterised not merely an improved lifestyle, but writing down brand names reflected the growing range of choice. Brands, and not the material substance, started to become the essential, sophisticated vehicle of difference. The year 1953 appears in the housekeeping books of the family as the first after the War in which the family could afford more than daily necessities. After so many years of scarcity, it seems that Germans were able to take a deep breath and let go somewhat the tension of the War and immediate post-war years.

The notion of “fast food” changed in the following years together with the general view of the use of time. In 1957 “fast and cheaply prepared food” came to the fore, but workload or money no longer took centre-stage. Instead, rapidity at cooking served a new goal: leisure time. The following may illustrate this conceptual shift: “Perhaps you drive into the countryside for Whit-sun, and you may defer the main meal till the evening. Back home, you may not be inclined to boil or fry things for a long time. You may camp in the woods and be happy with a picnic. Our suggestion suits all your plans.” Rapidity was not required to manage the immense amount of housework, but to organise the modern housewife’s time for herself and her family. In the rhetoric of *Die kluge Hausfrau* leisure time received a decisive value.

In 1954, the Zs went on holiday for the first time. For two weeks in July the family went to a campsite on the Baltic Sea coast, to which it returned for the following decade. These holidays became more and more expensive. For example, new air beds or swimming suits were bought. The mother did not always cook when camping, but she fetched the meal from a mobile kitchen. Instead of margarine, “Rama” was bought, and there was (pure) coffee and cake in the afternoon. Bouillon cubes and preserved (particularly canned) foods were used to prepare ready-to-serve meals. Camping in the 1950s was a typical opportunity for West Germans to become acquainted with canned food and ready-to-serve meals.

Connecting to the World

The increasing internationalisation of the recipes is unmistakable from the middle of the decade onward. In 1954, for example, *Die kluge Hausfrau* proposed to the housewife an “Irish stew”, a “Caucasian shish-kebab on rice”, a “mutton stew with curry” or “mutton chops à l’Italienne”. The common cabbage was transformed into “Swiss cabbage”, “Breton soup” or “Strasbourg red cabbage”. Mince became “Portuguese meatballs” or “steak à la Lyonnaise”, while rice became “Viennese rice”, “Serbian rice” or “rice Chinese style”. In 1956 a full page was devoted to international cuisine: “Other countries, other customs. It is fun to look at menus in a foreign country just as it is to look at historical monuments and works of art. Try a French onion soup. Don’t think English roast lamb with mint sauce is tasteless. It is excellent.” In 1958 *Die kluge Hausfrau* invited the reader to join a culinary world tour: cod à la Milanese, Portuguese spinach rolls, Parisian omelette, Dutch soup, and African banana salad. The menus were a preparation for a world journey: the taste of a foreign country could be tried out before the first trip to Yugoslavia or France.

The West German journalist K. Harpprecht characterised this West German post-war mentality in the periodical *Magnum* in 1960:

The Germans longed to be part of the ‘family of nations’. They were tired of standing apart, being alone, whether in a brilliant or in a miserable state. The desire to assimilate to the international standards of the taste, wishes, and needs has engulfed their architecture as well as their menus. (No architect would dare build an office block in any but the same way as his colleagues in Louisville, Nagasaki, or Lyon. No more would a restaurant forgo serving ‘Steak Hawaii’ or ‘Nasi Goreng’).[. . .] The Germans desperately want to strike lucky, and the world finally wants to have luck with the Germans as well. So we are resolved to be happy and mediocre.

In other words, people wanted to participate again in, and become recognised members of, the international community.

How tight this Eurocentric spirit was, was demonstrated by the highly imaginative idea of putting “Africa” only as a whole alongside the various European states. “Africa” was identified only with the banana salad. This caricature demonstrates clearly that international connotations with regard to foreign recipes were pure artefacts which hardly referred at all to the regions’ authentic cooking. Clearly, semiotics were in the foreground: the arbitrariness of the recipes’ rhetoric does not denote actual foreign cuisine, but the post-war German mentality of the 1950s. After the years of nationalism and belief in a superior race, the longing for an image of being one nation amongst others could on the one hand make it possible to forget the crimes of the past, and on the other hand help create a Europe of neighbours, not of enemies. In any case, the rigid identity of a master race destined to conquer the world dissolved, to be replaced by a self-image as a member of the European family. And food provided an excellent opportunity to achieve this.

The Z family organised a New Year’s Eve party for the first time in December 1954. Diced meat salad with mayonnaise, sausage, fried sardines, small hot sausages, ham, cheese, crab meat, sixteen doughnuts, coffee, two bottles of wine and twenty fireworks were bought. This was one of the few occasions at which the couple invited guests to their home. The Zs seldom ate out. Mrs G, one of the working-class housewives I have interviewed, also associated the 1950s with a distinctive sociability:

We really had terrific parties there. And everybody brought a little something, for example a bottle of whisky. Whisky was a great thing around 1955. Everybody drank whisky, no wine at all. There was wine only at great feasts and on holy days. A couple we knew then began to drink whisky. They were always ahead of their time. Then others started to drink it. Another more modest couple offered tea and pastries, or in summer buttermilk with lemon. We partied until the next morning. There were pretzel sticks, or baked cheese crackers. We were so lively at that time! Today people sit at the table, discuss, talk, drink wine. The cold buffet now is in the kitchen. But then we had games. A couple owned a tape recorder with which we recorded funny things. We danced and played cards. We were simply able to enjoy ourselves better than today.

Such parties took place in a non-television era, at a time in which only a radio was available in most families and very few could afford a record player or a tape recorder. These interviews, as a transfigured memory of the pre-television age, also mark the relief of leaving bad times behind. Now people could be lively and enjoy their “tight prosperity”. They did so by visiting each other at home, rather than going to cafés or restaurants. The small apartments did not prevent such sociability, perhaps the reverse. Also of importance in Mrs G’s description is that the visits were meant to make the newly gained prosperity visible to others.

It is therefore no coincidence that *Die kluge Hausfrau* published an article in the autumn of 1955 that announced the end of austerity:

We feel better now. I can imagine that you have a different opinion. Don’t we still have to juggle the housekeeping money? Don’t we have to wonder again and again whether we can allow ourselves something? Instead of that special something, shoes or clothing for the children must be bought. We hear everywhere that people have to calculate sharply although the husbands are earning significantly more. However, if we think it over quietly, we notice that this or that piece of furniture has been bought, and that we have become more fastidious and more demanding with regard to food and drink.

In previous years, the *kluge Hausfrau* has helped its readers economise and use the scarce goods more imaginatively, but around 1955 the time came to mark a break with the past. The years of scarcity, privation and complaint were declared over. Prior to 1955, the magazine had already opposed “false modesty”, suggesting that housewives become more conscious of their economic strength and spend their billions of marks in a “responsible” manner. Nevertheless, the rupture emphasised by the 1955 article was unmistakable in marking the end of the meagre years in which each *pfennig* had to count. A new practice of consumption had emerged, and now came the time to look further, beyond the limited horizon.

Exuberant Signs

At the end of the 1950s and in the early 1960s, the culinary rhetoric game seemed to have taken on a life of its own. The recipe pages included “Canaries escalope with bananas and lemons”, “artichoke hearts à la Piemontese” (canned artichokes with rice and ham), “Indian juice” made from canned pineapple, oranges, cardamom and ginger, or “Malaysia rice” prepared with almonds, chicken, crab meat, curry and garlic. This game of signs included even historical periods and figures. For example *Die kluge Hausfrau* presented recipes for “Mary-Stuart-soup”, “eggs Rossini”, “Verdi sauce” and “Radetzky gâteau” . . .

This multiplication of signs, which went hand in hand with the internationalisation of the recipes, testifies to a semiological exuberance in the late 1950s, that

had little basis in fact. For example, the magazine presented a “Swiss pork chop”, but this was a cheap version of *cordon bleu*: instead of ham, the pork chop was filled with tomato ketchup and a slice of cheese. Many other examples of such rhetoric hiding a rather simple meal may be given (such as “Royal Ragout”, “Fine fish ragout” or “Little pies à la Bolognese”). Even the herring’s value could be increased. In this way in the autumn of 1956 *Die kluge Hausfrau* wrote: “If one day the herring were to disappear from the menu, many women treasurers would go on a strike. The small kitchen knows how to make much of the unpretentious herring”. Then followed the “East Prussian cream herring”, “Herring rolls with wine” and “Maatjes filets with mushrooms”. Clearly, supper should no longer consist of bread and butter with sliced cold meat, but instead “Fried sausage with spicy potato salad”, “Spicy veal kidneys”, “Bananas with ham and bread” or “Tomato jelly” were recommended by *Die kluge Hausfrau*.

The comparison with the recipes of the early 1950s is striking. Limitation now seemed to be totally absent, and a much more demanding and expensive cuisine appeared on the recipe pages of the magazine. Another indication of crucial changes around 1955 was the instruction “to dress the dishes nicely”. This was to be arrived at in various ways: small carrots, beetroot, aspic, flowers, finely chopped parsley filling “little lemon baskets”, radishes skilfully cut, or cucumbers filled with diced meat and mayonnaise to make a “cucumber flotilla”. “If we have said goodbye to the grandiose decorations of the table, then such a small flotilla, an onion-skin with a toothpick as sail, helps to brighten our feelings. Every ‘boat’ is garnished with a radish and an asparagus head [. . .]”. Also, colours varied: “The cold potato salad can be decorated for example with mashed hard-boiled egg, chopped with greens or beetroot”. Diminutives appeared to dominate the rhetoric of *Die kluge Hausfrau*: “Salt dwarfs”, i.e. salt sticks with jam, topped by a little cap made of eggs, or “Eyes in a peacock’s feather”, i.e. bread slices spread with herb cream and topped with tomatoes, egg and sardine filets, started to appear on the recipe pages.

Mrs H described this period in the following words:

It started in 1959. Everyone wanted to drink brandy. And beer too. But now beer was sold in crates, no longer in single bottles. At the end of the 1950s roundsmen came to the door and asked whether we wanted beer or lemonade. Then *Schnittchen* came into fashion, little slices of bread topped only with roast beef or cooked ham. Other toppings were regarded as inferior. Parties became something of a competition. Which family could spend most? Sometimes I refused. I used to say that we couldn’t have everything. But my husband would answer: Don’t we have the money to do what we want now? Go, and buy it! (Wildt, 1994, p. 236)

After the years of scarcity people wanted to eat well. Money no longer mattered! Husbands appeared in other interviews too as the advocates of a comfortable life

wishing to allow themselves an extra. It seems as if these men wished to leave the uncomfortable deprivation years finally behind them and longed for a peaceful time, whose symbol was good meals. Whether this created the famous *Freßwelle* (wave of excessive food consumption) is uncertain.⁵ More meaningful are the dynamics by which this consumption drive became increasingly luxurious. Everywhere there was the pressure to offer more and more expensive sandwiches, cold dishes and buffets, as featured on the recipe pages of *Die kluge Hausfrau*.

The Z family in Kiel was also aware of greater convenience. Mr Z was given an electric razor at Christmas 1956, which was not paid for on credit. Also without credit, Mrs Z bought a new hat, as well as an outfit for herself and a jacket for her son in July 1957. In former years, such purchases would have taken them first to the bank. Moreover, a new radio worth DM 339 was purchased in 1957 without credit. On the other hand, the purchase of a new cupboard for a substantial DM 730 exceeded Mr Z's monthly wage by far. It was the greatest acquisition of the family till then, and the Zs were forced to borrow, despite the fact that the Christmas money was used for this purchase and that Mr Z earned a little extra money by playing the accordion at Christmas celebrations. Here, therefore, the Zs paid DM 350 deposit and monthly instalments until March 1958. On Christmas Eve 1958, Mr Z wrote in the housekeeping book: "1 television set, 53 cm, type "Weltblick", total price DM 885, paid a deposit of DM 295, the rest in instalments". No other consumer item was included as symbolically as the television set in the housekeeping books of this family. The daily shopping list had also changed noticeably. On Wednesdays, spare ribs were bought more frequently, while mince or salami were consumed occasionally on other weekdays. Peppers were new in September 1956, and from then on stuffed peppers were frequently served. At Christmas 1957 a duck from Poland, a bottle of rum and twenty cigars were put on the table. On New Year's Eve, ingredients had been bought for a pineapple punch, together with doughnuts, pretzel sticks, fireworks and paper streamers.

Bread consumption started to fall in the early 1950s. In 1949, mainly rye bread was eaten, and white bread only rarely. Four years later, the quantity of white bread had almost tripled, and hardly any rye bread appeared on the table. Spending on cake rose towards the end of the 1950s. Mrs Z baked cakes for weekends, but a piece of cake on Wednesday or Friday became usual, too. This may be seen as the end of a strict separation between weekly meals and Sunday meals. The sales figures for *Oetker*, the traditional manufacturer for baking powder in Germany, fully confirms the consumption shifts of families like the Zs. The sales of *Oetker's* standard article, *Backin* baking powder, fell continuously from the beginning of the 1950s. The marketing department of the company concluded in 1955 that "joy in baking" had vanished. The sale of a new product grew unexpectedly well: *Tortenguß* (jelly) was launched on the market very successfully in 1950 (Wildt, 1994, pp. 78–82). The contradictory patterns for *Backin* and jelly show the changes

in home baking. On the one hand housewives no longer wished to go through the time-consuming and burdensome process of baking, particularly that of preparing the dough. On the other hand, they insisted on giving their families a home-made dessert. They therefore baked a much simpler fruit pudding that, moreover, varied according to the season. Fruit puddings offered a double advantage: less arduous and exhausting work with a continued sense of domestic competence. In a similar way E. Dichter, one of the most successful advertisement experts in the United States during the 1950s, argued that housewives did not wish to hear from industrialists that “We produce the best cake in the world for you”, but rather: “You are a splendid cook. Our cake will offer you the possibility of using your talent without effort. You are the one who accomplishes this remarkable performance. We only supply you with the means” (Dichter, 1961, p. 216; Horowitz, 1998). This conflict between “self production” and the use of industrial products began to have a decisive influence on the cuisine of the 1950s.

The (Gendered) Meaning of Canned Food

It is a fact that preserved foods were sold increasingly after the Second World War. The consumption of preserved vegetables tripled in West Germany in the ten years between 1953–54 and 1963–64, and annual consumption per head doubled in the four years between 1958–59 and 1962–63 from 4 to 8 kg (Wildt, 1994, p. 155; Goody, 1982, pp. 157–61). How should this success be explained? About half of the housewives who were interviewed in 1956 by the *Allenbach Institut für Demoskopie* said that canned food was practical because of its rapidity, but also, with cans in the house “one always had something at home”. Preserved food was available in the shops at any time, which was an essential difference from the home-made jars of preserved beans, carrots, cherries or peas that were traditionally consumed in winter (Wildt, 1994, pp. 155–6).

Most housewives interviewed had bought canned food because the vegetables they wished to prepare were not for sale at that moment. Instead of choosing a different vegetable, they turned to canned food. Thus, next to the idea that time and work is saved by using cans, a desire to overcome seasonal restrictions also existed. Logically, canned food was bought primarily during the winter months: more than 75 per cent of the households using preserved vegetables bought cans between November and April. Preserved foods bridged the seasonal gap, and housewives were able to offer their families a broad range of vegetables the whole year round (Wildt, 1994, pp.155–7). Mrs H, for example, says of her former kitchen garden:

We had the garden approximately eight or ten years. I had preserved vegetables throughout all these years, about 200 jars every year. No meat, only vegetables. Then I stopped preserving pickled cabbage and I started to buy it. But I didn't buy any canned

food at all at that time. The first cans were pineapple chunks. These were cans from the USA. Nobody in the family wanted to go with me to the garden later. Nobody wanted bean salad today and bean stew tomorrow. Oh God, beans again!, my family would cry. They wanted to eat cauliflower at Easter and not when it was the season for cauliflower. They didn't want to eat beans only in the summer, but in the winter, too, when beans were quite expensive. (Wildt, 1994, p. 157)

Mrs H's testimony shows that home-made jars were losing their importance in the 1950s. If it had been only a "practical" matter, then preserving ought to have disappeared gradually. Preserving vegetables was expensive and time-consuming work, which took a housewife several days at harvest time. Moreover, experience and skill were needed. Where home-made preserving did not disappear, it must therefore have had advantages over canned food. Perhaps home-made preserving contributed to the image of the competent housewife: esteem for the work done, and appreciation of the particular taste of the home-made product. Almost all housewives said that they saved money by preserving, and that they could not afford expensive canned food. The majority of them therefore wished to stop preserving as soon as canned food became cheaper. However, there was a considerable proportion of women who wished to go on preparing home-made preserves, even if the price of canned food were to fall. For them, it was simply a matter of a better taste. All in all, canned food made the daily menu independent of the seasons, and meant much less work, but according to the women, it did not taste as good as the home-made product.

Both practices, home cooking and industrially produced food, were a battlefield of conflicting meaning. On the one hand, there was the need to save time and to lighten domestic work, and on the other hand there was the image of a competent housewife, who would not willingly have admitted to using canned food. However, there was a second image, that of the "modern housewife", particularly relevant to younger women. These would use industrially produced food without hesitation. In the 'conflict' between canned and home-made food the clash of techniques, personal skill and dexterity was also present. The "sensuality" of the home-made jars contrasted with the "rationality" of industrial food, which was crystallised in the ambiguous concept of taste. Industrially produced food also looked "beautiful and delicious", with an appetising label. The home-made preserves were associated with the taste of the old family ways of preparation, good, familiar times and housewife's knowledge. The conflict between "self-production" and use of convenience food indicated a significant change in identity and self-image of the female role in West German society. The traditional skills of housewives were replaced by a new type of spouse who was able to manage her household like an engineer and was more acquainted with electric appliances than with handicraft so as to gain more leisure time which could be used, among other things, to restyle her own appearance.

Healthy and Slim

On the recipe pages of *Die kluge Hausfrau* the rhetoric of the kitchen seemed to have arrived at its zenith around 1958. Reference was continuously made to “delicacy”, “dainty” or “gourmet”. Even plain old pasta became “gourmet pasta”, and there was hardly a dish that was not overloaded with symbolic signs. Whether globetrotter or gourmet, *Die kluge Hausfrau* did not have limits in this respect. However, at the same time a watershed seems to have been reached: the recipes of the early 1960s were clearly different from those of the 1950s “paper” kitchen.

The game of culinary signs had quickly reached a high point, but it collapsed in an equally fast manner around 1960. “Canapés”, “cucumber flotillas”, and “salt dwarfs” disappeared from the recipe pages. Instead, a new theme began to dominate *Die kluge Hausfrau*’s pages: health! At the end of 1961 the magazine recommended a wholemeal breakfast in the following way: “Breakfast has changed. Today, no-one limits themselves to rolls with butter and marmalade. More and more, people want a wholemeal breakfast because they feel much fresher and more efficient as a result. There are vitamins and minerals in wholemeal bread without which nobody can remain healthy in the long run.” A monthly supplement (“The healthy family”) was published in *Die kluge Hausfrau* from the beginning of the 1960s on. It contained short nutritional notes, health tips, advertising, and medical reports. In a special column (“Advice from nurse Renate”) the editorial staff answered the readers’ letters on questions of diet and health (What can one do against a cold? What food contains lecithin? Is honey harmful for those with high blood pressure?). In defining a healthy diet, the “latest scientific knowledge” was called upon regularly, and science was recognised as the decisive authority for problems related to “good” and “bad” eating in terms of modernity and health. It is true that physicians had appeared earlier in the columns of the magazine to give advice on a healthy diet, but previously these recommendations had limited themselves to approved household remedies. Now, at the beginning of the 1960s, science had become the most important authority on a “healthy diet”. Such a scientifically based healthy diet was presented as “modern”. “Today”, wrote *Die kluge Hausfrau* at the beginning of 1959, “the consumer eats more consciously. Everybody wants to live healthily. First of all, vegetables and fruit are gaining importance. Household reasons (modern technology saving time) as well as health reasons have opened up industrially produced food for the consumer.” In this way, the magazine connected a healthy diet to rationalisation of household chores.

Next to the discourse on healthy diet, a second line developed in the magazine’s rhetoric on eating: being slim. The combination of health, naturalness and slimness had turned up earlier in an almost epigrammatic sentence: “The natural form is the slim body”, was written in 1952. Yet this was not a post-war innovation. The

body, particularly the female body, was determined by the norms of a male-defined society, whether under fascism, in the inter-war period or in the bourgeois period prior to 1914. “Healthy”, “slim” or “well fed” did not (and do not) depend on natural, but on historical and changeable criteria (Baudrillard, 1970, p. 199; Tanner, 1997, pp. 610–13). The female body in the post-war period was not construed as the simple continuation of male-defined images. Woman’s image in the 1950s was increasingly influenced by growing prosperity and increased leisure time. The mother and the housewife no longer dominated female stereotypes. The “new woman” was pictured as a “smart wife” who could “afford” to be stylish and attractive. The technicality of kitchens and the rationalisation of the household did not mean that women now had more time for themselves. Women were given the role of the “smart” (*adrett*) wife, as it was called in the 1950s. In 1962 an article in *Die kluge Hausfrau*, “Remaining young through true diet”, formulated particularly this extended female model:

Only a few decades ago, a woman of forty belonged to the old age group. She was regarded as *passé* and was pushed aside. She was just a mother who had her definite place within the family, who raised the children and worried about the grandchildren later. The modern forty-year-old woman of today seems young and flexible, although she has frequently to bear a double load. She has a job and has to care for her family. But she is firmly determined to keep her youth for a long time, unlike her grandmother. She knows the secrets of rejuvenation: a right diet is the most essential precondition in remaining young.

In the early 1960s the connection of diet and slimness was dominant in *Die kluge Hausfrau*. Headings read “Eat yourself beautiful!”, “Slimming with pasta?”, “How many calories do you need?” or “Desserts for the slim line”. The “slim line” took over the columns so much that the editorial staff sometimes came out in favour of unbridled consumption. In its Christmas issue of 1961 the magazine wrote that everybody knows that a luxurious diet is not healthy. But no-one could forbid everything all of the time, so “feast on and enjoy at least once in the year all that the kitchen and cellar have to offer”.

Both types of rhetoric about health and the slim diet coincided with the concept of modernity. The “modern housewife” had another view of what constituted a healthy diet than her mother had had; she knew about calories, vitamins and proteins, she used electric appliances in the kitchen, and cared for herself as a “smart wife” thanks to her clever, rational work planning. In 1962, *Die kluge Hausfrau* depicted the new, modern cuisine in the following way:

A striking revolution has taken place in the kitchen during the last years. It does not make itself noticeable only in the kitchen, where useful furniture prevails and practical

appliances are used. A radical change has also taken place in the field of nutrition. The physical stress, the pace, the whole demanding lifestyle of today – everything leads to the desire for natural and healthy food which should be adapted to our modern rhythm of life.

The concept of “modernity” seems to be the point of intersection of both discourses about “healthy diet”. The 1960s housewife found plenty of time to take care of herself: she switched from the role of mother to the role of kitchen manager and nutrition expert, and finally to the role of “smart spouse” – in sum, she became a “modern woman”.

Conclusions

The qualitative change in consumption at the end of the 1950s was not simply a matter of economic growth, higher rates of consumption, and the use of industrially produced food. Entering a self-service store, buying canned food, preparing snacks, the “modern” women, “light and healthy cooking” – all this was becoming familiar. The memory of hunger, ever-present in the mind of the older generation, was disappearing. Of course, many households, like the Z family of Kiel, had to stick to a tight budget, but at the end of the 1950s the need for modest frugality was passing, along with structural restrictions and cultural limitations of an “older” way of living.

Food became an important way of expressing society’s hope of “normality”, once the monetary reform of 1948 had been launched. For many Germans “normality” implied “free from worry”, which in turn implied food affluence. This may explain the stores overflowing with goods, the conspicuous consumption at parties and the carelessness with money, the internationalisation of the cuisine (at least, on paper), and the exuberance of signs (whisky, particular toppings, canned food etc.). With the extension of this universe of consumption, working-class households began to abandon their *proletarian* lifestyle. This is not to say that social inequality disappeared in the 1950s, but that traditional consumer hierarchies gave way to more “subtle differences”. In becoming part of the consumer society everyone had, in the words of Bourdieu, to take care “not to differ from the ordinary, but to differ differently” (Bourdieu, 1975, p. 70). From the increasing range of options, consumers had to learn to choose and to develop their own distinctive style as expression of their individual identity. Where in former times and for long years preparing meals meant making much out of little, now it was a question of learning to construct individuality out of plenty.

Notes

1. *Die kluge Hausfrau* had been launched before the Second World War, and it appeared every two weeks from 1949 and weekly from 1955. At that time it had a print of more than a million copies. It was the biggest shopping magazine of the food trade in the 1950s, and it competed with other widespread magazines like *Stern*. In 1964, a market research showed that the readership of *Die kluge Hausfrau* corresponded exactly to households that had been selected by the Federal Statistics Board as representative of working-class income and expenditure (Wildt, 1994, pp. 215–17).
2. This type of household accounted for almost 15 per cent of the West German population. Although the increase of income was substantial in the 1950s (the average working-class family income grew from 343 DM per month in 1950 to 975 DM in 1963), the budget remained tight and frugal until the late 1950s, and expenditure on food was still the predominant item in total spending. In 1950 these households spent 133 DM each month on food, or 46 per cent. By 1963 this cost had risen in absolute figures to 193 DM, and was still the largest item in the family budget, accounting for 35 per cent (all figures in constant 1959 prices).
3. CARE (or “Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe”) was one of several charitable organisations in the United States which tried to help destitute families in Europe (Stüber, 1984, pp. 442–518).
4. For my study on consumption in West Germany during the 1950s (Wildt, 1994) I interviewed eleven housewives born between 1923 and 1931. Most of them stemmed from working-class families in Hamburg and lived in similar conditions to the family Z.
5. The development of consumption in West Germany has often been compared with waves (Timm, 1958, pp. 243–73; Abelshausen, 1987, p. 56–60): First there was the *Freßwelle* (eating wave), followed by the *Bekleidungswelle* (clothes), *Einrichtungswelle* (furniture), and *Reisewelle* (travel).

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**Identification Process at Work:
Virtues of the Italian Working-Class
Diet in the First Half of the
Twentieth Century**

Paolo Sorcinelli

(translation by Susan West)

For most people in Italy a poor diet had been characteristic during the largest part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was only very recently that the Italian consumption of “rich” foodstuffs such as meat, sweets or dairy products increased. While in 1885 Italians ate an average of 11 kilos of meat per year, in 1955 the figure rose to 14 kilos, to then leap ahead to 46 kilos in 1974. This was an increase of 27 per cent during the first seventy years and of 28 per cent over the last twenty years. As in other countries of the West, this awakened some distressing fears with regard to the body, both for reasons of health and with regard to ideals of beauty. A worldwide reaction against too great a food intake since the 1980s included a model of the “Mediterranean diet” with olive oil, lots of vegetables, pasta and fish. This diet seems all too familiar to Italians, probably more so than to inhabitants of northern countries. Indeed, up to a few years ago a cruder variation of this type of diet was imposed in Italy as a “necessity” by political and economic circumstances. For many Italians, the “Mediterranean diet” that is making its way so successfully in Europe’s kitchens, therefore seems to have less allure although Italians seem to have rehabilitated pasta and favoured fish and white meat, all flavoured with olive oil, and accompanied by vegetables.

This attitude cannot be fully understood without insight into the poor diet of the first half of the twentieth century and the many attempts to form the “ideal eater”, forged along lines of middle-class, fascist and “modern” ideology and practice. I’d like to stress two aspects of food in Italy, which willy-nilly have come to form part of the Italian identity for many years. I propose to focus on the “frugal diet” that was part of the dominant ideology during the Fascist regime; then I will consider the extremely slow improvement of the average Italian diet up to the late 1950s.

Peasant Frugality as a Virtue in the Inter-war Years

A concept common to middle-class thought at the turn of the century was that of the “frugal diet” of the Italian people, experts at making do and performing best when eating little and badly. Of course, there was no lack of less categorical and more debatable opinions. On the one hand, there was a glorification of the “prudent and parsimonious spirit” and “modest living requirements”, on the other hand, the image of the peasant as the “robust hard worker” was clouded by observations of listlessness, apathy, phlegm, indolence and even judgements portraying him as having “slow reflexes”, unable to work rationally and with continuity, given to idle chatter and yawning “slower than an old ox” (Sorcinelli, 1996, pp. 160–1). These were negative characteristics which appeared in relation to the question of diet. The majority of the literature, in fact, provides explanations linking these personality and psychological traits to the negligible protein intake provided by the usual diet based on cereals and vegetables, in conjunction with an abuse of wine to make up for the calorie deficiencies (Celli, 1894, p. 9).

On the threshold of the twentieth century, surveys provided a highly indicative picture of the Italian diet. With regard to the different social classes, carbohydrates ranged from a maximum of 90 to a minimum of 71 per cent; fats from 14 to 13 per cent and proteins from 25 to 5 per cent. In better-off families, the average diet was much more balanced with 55 per cent carbohydrates, 18 per cent lipids and 25 per cent proteins, proportions which suggest a sufficient intake of vegetable and animal substances (Bottazzi et al, 1933). In 1923, Giovanni Loriga wrote:

It would seem logical to direct the efforts of those caring about the well-being of the poor classes particularly towards procuring them a greater quantity of protein. The scarcity of this is rightly thought to be one of the main causes of slow physical development, emaciated or pallid appearance, precocious ageing, lack of energy and low propensity for work commonly noted among the poorest classes and especially among peasants.

He was not alone in considering that the Italian’s reputation for being “sober by tradition” deserved close consideration, as there were in fact “two types of sobriety, one from choice which is a fine virtue in the prosperous, the other from necessity, which may be an expression [. . .] of economic and physiological poverty”. The aim was to split up the cliché of “Italian sobriety” and the stereotype of the Italian prone to the *dolce far niente*, and to sound a note of alarm, because this characteristic could be a “necessity not infrequently imposed by the lack of pulses and vegetables on the overly meagre table” (Ducceschi, 1928, p. 5). Thus even this “indolence often noted in southern populations” and seen as “a lack of the will to work” was interpreted as a consequence of “the most irrational and disorderly

diet” which ended up affecting “the health, industriousness and productivity of our race” (Fantini, 1941, p. 185). There was, however, the other side of the coin. Reversing the terms, as in a report dating from 1938, some claimed that indolence was not the effect of the “poor diet of many of our workers”, but its cause. Referring to the six million Italians who at the beginning of the 1950s found themselves living in poverty, others were quick to identify their idleness and ignorance as the only “causes” (Accame, 1982, p. 63).

The rural and the urban proletariat usually devoted little time and attention to the preparation of food. At the work place and without sitting down, farm labourers and city workers ate large pieces of bread or polenta accompanied by onions and garlic or at best sardines, anchovies or a herring. When they ate at home, the meal was usually rushed and frugal (Gualtieri, 1984, pp. 30–2). In 1902 at the second congress of studies on pellagra, Giovanni Loriga divided the Italian population into two blocks, peasants and non-peasants, to explain that the diet of the former should be “defined as a privation regime”. Here, the concepts of *quality and quantity* took on particular significance as “the peasant ate not for nourishment, but to fill the stomach and alleviate hunger pangs”. The majority of the population thought in terms not so much of *eating well* as of *having a full plate and a full belly*. Moreover, the prosaic everyday reality was overturned only on “feast-days” and “special days”, “wedding banquets” and particular work occasions, revealing “the other face of the starvation culture”, that of the “glutton, the hero of those popular epics which have always provided ample material for the gastronomic anecdote” (Montanari, 1992, p. 21).

For a large part of the population in the most backward areas, the saying ‘if a poor man eats a hen, either the poor man is ill or the hen is ill’, continued to find concrete and objective confirmation up until just a few years ago (Sorcinelli, 1999, p. 157). Thus, while on the one hand Pellegrino Artusi, with his famous cook book (*La scienza in cucina e l’arte di mangiare bene* – “The science of cooking and the art of eating well”, published in 1891), helped plan and unify the various regional cuisines and sanctioned, for example, the official entrance of potato gnocchi into the daily menu and the introduction of tomato sauce as a condiment for pasta dishes (until then, tomatoes were mainly eaten raw or used on meat, eggs, fish and chicken), on the other, he noted with regret, but as though it were natural, that “those disinherited by destiny are obliged against their will to make a virtue of necessity and draw consolation from the fact that an active and frugal life helps make the body stronger and healthier” (Camporesi, 1989, p. 103).

This was a concept which was to be politically and scientifically theorised extensively during the years of the Fascist regime when, while not abandoning the principle of the indigenous and salutary frugal diet, the sacrifices of the “Great War” had in some way to be justified and emphasis placed on the policies of Mussolini’s new economic regime.

In 1930, the economist Arrigo Serpieri entered the field to demonstrate that the recent conflict had not been just a military event with “important” territorial and political consequences, but had also had positive repercussions on the culinary tendencies of the Italians. Thanks to the victuals provided to the soldiers, it had contributed “to making the dietary habits of the peasants less frugal”. An almost contemporary contribution from Luigi Messedaglia is in the same key. He recognised a “cause and effect relationship” between the “enrolment of large numbers of peasants in the army” and the establishment of a “richer and more varied” diet. He also underlined the “magnificent results of the battle of grain” (proclaimed in July 1925), which had “relegated hunger and malnutrition to history, almost like slavery and serfdom”. A high-handed statement which, according to the author, “required no justification or demonstration” as “anyone who has had experience of life in the fields is very well aware that after the war peasants lived better than in the past and that their diet improved considerably. Our peasant [. . .] became [. . .] a consumer of good wheat bread, eggs, milk and dairy products and meat. His diet was still frugal, but for him, meat was no longer a luxury food, reserved for the occasional feast day” (Messedaglia, 1932).

In 1929, a study in the province of Padua noted that “unfortunately, the conditions of the masses are still sad today and there is still much to be done before farm labourers reach a state of relative well-being, with a sufficiently high quality of life and level of civilisation. Too many houses are still unhygienic, food is too poor and typhus is too common” (Milone, 1929). In 1930, Ugo Giusti looked at consumption in ten urban centres and among uncertainties, circumlocutions, euphemisms and hair-splitting of various sorts, he reached conclusions which presented as favourable the diet of the first three decades of the 1900s. While starting out by saying that consumption “as had always been acknowledged, was obviously extremely limited”, he went on to stress a number of clearly favourable aspects such as the “return to”, or indeed the overtaking of “pre-war levels” of meat consumption; a “marked increase [. . .] in the consumption of fresh fish, at its peak in towns and cities in the south”; an increase in the “consumption of eggs, coffee and, even more markedly, of sugar” (Bottazzi et al, 1933, pp. 195–7). The available figures show that food consumption was in fact becoming better and more varied. However, generally speaking, despite the propaganda, carbohydrates still held the uncontested supremacy, accounting in the south for 80 per cent of the total calorie intake (Zingali, 1933, p. 9).

The gap between the diets of the different social classes and the different economic means at their disposal showed no signs of closing, at least not to any great extent, and, apart from the triumphalistic expressions used in a number of pages of his most famous publications, Messedaglia still represents the most tangible example of a whole series of ambiguous and manipulative stances evident in descriptions of the diet of farm labourers and the “fixed-income middle classes”.

While he glorified the consumption of white bread as proof of a new well-being, just a few pages later he was forced to retrace his steps and stigmatise this trend because if “it is thought that the whiter the bread, the healthier it is”, this is not in fact the case. “The tendency to prefer so-called refined bread [. . .] is beneficial neither from an economic point of view nor in terms of hygiene [. . .]. The best and most complete way to use wheat in bread making is to stone-grind the wheat as our fathers did, when the race was still strong and had no need of bioplastin or glycerophosphate injections” (Messedaglia, 1932, pp. 239, 252).

Suggestions and statements in this vein were common throughout the 1930s in an incessant pounding of patriotic and populist demagogy which (inevitably) reached its peak in 1941 when it was admitted in clear terms that if “the bread in Italy today is not white [. . .], then this is undoubtedly, at least in one sense, a good thing” (Bertarelli, 1941). Those who have studied food consumption during the first decade of the Fascist period have identified a political and production strategy based on the “battle of grain” and aimed at “dietary reconversion”. In the name of giving priority to energy content, the objective was to favour cereals over proteins which would have weighed too heavily on the trade budget: a “grain reform” which, as at other times in Italy’s history and over and above the high-sounding proclamations, was in any case founded on customs protection and to the detriment of the country’s livestock resources. In fact, “while this was precisely the time when most of the main European capitalist countries were making the transition from *mass production* (above all of cereal products) to *quality production* (vegetables and animal products), Italy [was] obliged to continue giving priority to cereal products as a source of the energy [. . .] indispensable to the human diet” (Giannetti & Rustichini, 1978, pp. 353–5).

This “anti-historical” process on one hand represented a guarantee that cereal prices would be kept high and on the other “delayed the specialisation of Italian agriculture by several decades” and, by blocking imports after the crisis of 1929, in fact resulted in a generalised drop in consumption. “If Mussolini’s intention with the *battle of grain* had been to ensure that *soldiers and the Italian population* had enough bread, then this objective was not in any way realised” (Zamagni, 1990, pp. 327–8). Despite the fact that, according to official figures, in Italy the availability of nutritional substances and assimilation of calories reached a peak in 1931, in terms of the quality of diet, in 1938 the *average Italian* ranked eighteenth in the European classification (Meldini, 1988, p. 456). It is easy to describe what actually happened in the 1930s (even before March 1936 and Mussolini’s proclamation of economic self-sufficiency to “bring [. . .] the maximum possible autonomy to the economic life of the country”). On the tables of Italy, consumption of pulses, tomatoes, vegetables, fruit, pork and mutton, animal fats, wine and coffee fell and – contrary to what might have been expected – so did consumption of cereals. Consumption of beef and olive oil was unchanged (in other words, low

and with marked regional and social differences). Products favoured by the regime's propaganda (milk, sugar, fish, poultry and potatoes) increased marginally. And perhaps more than any other figure or statistical data, this trend is confirmed by the dates of publication and titles of an article in "Quaderni di cultura popolare" (Notes on popular culture) and a cook book. The first, *Mangiare bene e spendere poco* ("Eat well and cheaply") dates from 1932, the second, *A regime . . . ma senza rinunce* ("Dieting . . . without sacrifices"), from 1933.

An international study from 1939 calculated that in the previous twelve years, Italian families had spent 56 per cent of their income on food (as opposed to 20 per cent fifty years later!), lower only than the percentage in Mexico, Poland, Estonia, Belgium and Colombia. However, this average (significant according to the economic rule that the percentage spent on food drops as income increases) included very different realities. It ranged from 35 per cent for clerical workers, 61 per cent for manual workers, 49 per cent for skilled workers and 50 per cent for smallholders, to 95 per cent for workers in the "low income" category (Sorcinelli, 1999, p. 162). So everyone followed an established rule, also because while Fascist policies glorified "the domestic ritual of the family united around the table", they also created the slogan "don't buy" and at least on the surface, declared war on the standard of living of the middle classes in the "exclusive neighbourhoods" (Ceserani, 1988, p. 100). In reality, a massive invasion of radio publicity unequalled in any other European country – and, given that possession of wireless sets was limited, obviously aimed at precisely those same middle classes whose standard of living the regime was apparently committed to controlling and restraining – created profound incongruity between political intentions and business interests (Isola, 1990, p. 193). At the same time, propaganda promoted national and domestic self-sufficiency, which was hostile to animal proteins (judging the steak which populated the dreams of so many Italians as "a valuable food, but not completely indispensable") and glorified the idyllic austerity of the "piece of bread eaten with appetite near a clear source of water".

Certainly, the examples were taken to extremes here, but the message was clear all the same: to orient consumption towards food products produced within the country. On the other hand, this was more than just rhetoric, as is clear from the memories and stories of those who lived through the period in which children at nursery and elementary schools were made to learn by heart Mussolini's exhortation to love and respect bread: "heart of the house/perfume of the table/joy of the hearth/sweat of the brow/pride of work/poem of sacrifice". As a result of the policy to reduce medium and medium-low incomes, implemented throughout almost all the 1930s, bread genuinely ended up as the dietary staple. "It was soaked in milk in the morning, in sauce at midday, in broth in the evening and even in wine. Bread and jam, bread and tomato, bread and omelette, bread and oil and bread and vegetables were eaten. Woe betide anyone who played with bread at table, in short,

woe betide anyone who wasted it” (Mafai, 1987, pp. 78–9).

The 15 December 1937 issue of “Sapere” reminds us that in the “good book” of Olindo Guerrini dating from 1917, *L'arte di utilizzare gli avanzi della mensa* (“The Art of using leftovers”), a full forty-two ways are given for recycling leftover bread, while in June 1941, this same scientific magazine used the slogan “*for complete self-sufficiency in our daily bread*” to publicise the volume *Panificazione* (a full 854 pages!) by Arnaldo Luraschi and published by Hoepli (Sorcinelli, 1999, p. 187). In the same way with the catch phrase: “A frugal diet is always a virtue; during periods of constraint, it becomes a civic duty”, we are reminded that “five grams of bread saved per person per day means saving the grain from several tens of thousands of hectares of wheat grown”, and the act of “throwing away leftover bread” was stigmatised as the “act of a bad citizen”. This bread, even if stale, could still “be used to prepare *pantrito* (breadcrumbs) or eaten in milk” (Bertarelli, 1941). People were also taught not to “waste” pea pods which could be used to make vegetable purée and that cherry stones ground in a mortar with the addition of water, alcohol and sugar are essential in the preparation of “home-made” liqueurs. He also advised against keeping food too long in water to avoid wasting the vitamins and not to throw away the water “vegetables have been cooked in” as it could be used to “make soups, sauces and *stacciate*” (a kind of flat loaf). It was also a civic duty to cook potatoes in the skin and immerse the meat for broth directly in boiling water, as although this reduced the quality, it would also “coagulate the proteins rapidly”, thus improving nutritional value and saving money (Vené, 1988, pp. 153–7). Using national resources as efficiently as possible (the campaign in favour of the consumption of rice and sugar was massive), as well as having the “dual advantage” of guaranteeing the “full political independence of the country” and lightening the balance of trade, also brought the country closer to the principles of social justice, improved physical health and signified a return to nature.

A policy of nutritional self-sufficiency could not in fact be based solely on economic justifications. It would have remained too distant from the common sense of the people who perceived food to be one of the crucial elements of their everyday existential condition. There was therefore an attempt to pose the problem in terms of a collective disciplining justified by the so-called Italian way of eating which could be founded exclusively on what was available from Italy’s agriculture, fishing, hunting and livestock rearing, thanks to the particular “basic metabolism of the average Italian”, slower than in other European populations whose “work and environmental conditions are very different from the work and environmental conditions found in Italy” (Galeotti, 1935, p. 23). In practice, this meant leaving things as they were, where consumption was already low and urging the lower-middle and middle classes to consume less, to move towards “a social equilibrium consistent with that closing of gaps which is the basis of social justice”. Given that “between the two extremes – eating little and eating a lot – the former is less

damaging”, it was necessary to aim at sobriety and culinary simplicity, with a “reform of cooking” and a “return to nature”. So out with meat, white bread, sugar and alcohol, substances which had a negative effect on the race as “un-physiological foods, the bearers of disease and death”, in favour of the so-called “physiological foods”, namely, milk and its by-products, eggs, honey, cereals, vegetables, fruit and bread. And not just in the name of economic necessity. In fact, “with the invitation to all citizens to moderate consumption of meat, Fascist Italy not only prevents many millions from lining the pockets of countries which today try with all the means at their disposal to obstruct the fatal expansion of the Italian people, but also make our race, whose growing prolificacy and certain longevity is feared by the Nordic carnivores”, even healthier and more in harmony with the traditions of Mediterranean frugality (Sorcinelli, 1999, p. 167).

So the catch phrases of domestic economy and the maintenance of health therefore recommended milk for small children and bread for everyone at every meal, according to a sort of “religion of bread” which derived from the “wisdom and good taste” of the Italian people who, by favouring this type of moderate diet, would lose nothing of their “typical robustness” and “instinctive cheerfulness” (Bertarelli, 1939). Every day, cereals and vegetables in abundance; three or four times a week, tomatoes, pulses, eggs, fish and cheese (De Michelis, 1937, pp. 69–71). And cheese instead of meat, given that the belief that the “dietary value” of meat is higher than that of dairy products is nothing but an “impression” (Bertarelli, 1939). In addition, this type of dietary regime was more than just a simple matter of the calories, protein and salts assimilated. It also emphasised the “spirit of the food”, the “biological state” of products. At the height of their vital process, their seasonal cycle, these were, in fact, endowed with “special characteristics”, a “somatic memory”, a “metabolic imprinting” which enabled the human organism to assimilate their nutritional properties completely and fully.

The inevitable consequence of these confused and distorted concepts was a glorification of the rustic life, or the identification of the Italian ‘people’ with a sober diet. Only in the life of the peasant and within the seasonal cycles could one find, “in association and coinciding”, the requisites of the natural ideal, health and physical vigour, a “free and spontaneous choice” from among “natural foods, an active metabolism and work”. To influence the collective imagination concretely and positively, this was then associated with the greater prolificacy of the rural classes and their hypothetically greater sexual potency. While meat made you fat and an excess of protein “could lead to sterility”, sugars assimilated through physiological foods such as bread and pasta “favoured reproduction” (Tallarico, 1934; Businco, 1941). On the other hand, the lower-middle classes, attached to an external image based on certain status symbols, might also look favourably on these rules which enabled them to save on food. In this context Fernanda Momigliano gave valuable dietary advice in a leaflet which set out in 1933 to teach readers how to

Vivere bene in tempi difficili (“Live well in difficult times”). She did this by taking as a model the family (husband, wife and two children) of a clerk in an insurance company with a salary of 1,300 lira a month. The weekday meals of this family were to be based on soups, pasta or rice prepared with different combinations of potatoes, beans, dried peas, chick peas, carrots, tomatoes, pumpkin and courgettes. This combination would enable the family to eat without committing the sin of gluttony and in respect of the regime’s instructions and at the same time to “put on a good show”, keeping appearances up to a certain level while spending just over 40 per cent of its income (Momigliano, 1933). Following the dietary model of the peasant, also dictated by instinct and tradition, the “nation” and the community would thus in a single blow have achieved the three-fold objective of “favouring national products, preserving physical health” and “contributing to demographic increase”.

For the middle classes too, self-sufficiency and the later war measures caused considerable complications to everyday life, although at different levels. While during the First World War, economic difficulties had induced Olindo Guerrino to recommend the most suitable methods for saving and recycling food and respecting the decrees against “luxurious consumption” in force from the autumn of 1916, a similar necessity was to emerge again during the Second World War. Examples of this were the widely publicised but relatively ineffective “war allotments” initiative and the still less convincing claim that “a not insignificant contribution [could be made] to improving the domestic economy” by teaching Italians how to rear poultry for eggs on their balconies and in the attics of city flats (Clementi, 1941). So we see among the abundant advice, the reassuring tips published by the magazine *Eva* in August 1942 and, the following year, the *200 suggerimenti per . . . questi tempi* (“200 suggestions for . . . our times”) by Amalia Moretti Foggia, alias Petronilla. The task of “Eva”, Petronilla and other similar initiatives implemented by the Propaganda Office of the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* was not the easiest, not simply because the publisher Garzanti, in a sort of admirable defiance of the times, or perhaps motivated by calculated psychological transference, published at the same time a volume by Marescalchi to inform readers about the *Storia dell'alimentazione umana e dei piaceri della tavola* (“History of human diet and the pleasures of eating”). More importantly, in the name of a *healthy Italian etiquette*, both convivial and at the same time in harmony with the economic regulations then in force, these publications had to try and reconcile the upper classes to the concept of parsimony (*parsimonia*). The basic problem was to teach them how to maintain the social value of the luncheon party while at the same time respecting the sanctions which imposed “habits and rules of economy and simplicity which must be respected by everyone in everything with joyful serenity”. Thus the prudent and circumspect journalist responsible for the *Signora di casa* (“Housewife”) column in the magazine *Eva* and the authors of *Per voi signore*

and *Ricette autarchiche* (“For you, ladies” and “Self-sufficient recipes”) in the “Gazzetta della Domenica” played on the concepts that “waste is bad taste”; that “you can still live well, even going without meat for two or three days a week”; that with a little “imagination and adaptation” you can produce “unusual but excellent dishes”; that “good breeding should not be confused with frivolous ambitions” and, finally, that “everything you do must be done with intelligence and not as an automaton with a confusion of wheels and rods instead of a brain”.

Even a middle-class family could thus be induced to follow a healthy diet based on cereals and vegetables. In short, all you had to do was accept that “an animal diet” (meat and eggs) was an “error for which mankind was paying with infinite suffering”. A “satanic error” which, despite the “numerous changes” of recent years and the spread of “vegetarianism”, the “masses still insist on perpetuating”, maintaining that “a beautiful steak covering the entire surface of the plate is more nourishing than a plate of pulses or fruit”. Even literature could be a “useful tool to improve knowledge of the subject” and to that end everybody was recommended to read “the book by the Doctors Masoni, *Frutta, legumi e verdure*” (“Fruit, pulses and vegetables”), according to the propaganda of the time “as accurate as was possible” (Sorcinelli, 1999, pp. 170–1).

Post-war Diets: “Facing Poverty after having Lost its Place in the Sun”

A survey carried out between January and February 1947 of sixty-five families in Rome examined the quantity of food consumed by “poor families” and “well-off families”, in other words, those who spent more than half their income on food and those who remained well below this level. While the former could afford 24 g of oils and fats per capita, the latter reached 66 g; the gap between the consumption of milk, cheese and eggs of the two groups was 87 g against 182 g; 393 g and 629 g for pulses, 417 g and 553 g for wheat and 46 and 238 g for wine. As a consequence, each member of a “deprived” family had an intake of 72 g of protein and 39 g of lipids as against 120 g of protein and 104 of lipids in a “well-off” family (Somogyi, 1973, p. 871). Thus, immediately after the Second World War, from this point of view, Italy was still “one of the countries [. . .] in the low income group”, in other words, with economic conditions similar to those in Greece, Turkey, Japan, Spain and Portugal, an Italy which neo-realist film-makers immortalised in films such as *Ladri di biciclette* (“Bicycle Thieves”), *Miracolo a Milano* and *Umberto D.*; which Christian Democrats saw as “frugal and peasant”, the communists as “poor and depressed, colonised by American capital” and the right as “facing poverty after having lost its *place in the sun*”, while “nearly everyone thought it was destined to remain the relatively poor *proletarian* country it had always been” (Accame, 1982, p. 70).

In fact, in 1951, the per capita income of Italians (8.5 million of whom worked in the primary sector, 6 million in industry and 4 million in the tertiary sector) was “40 per cent of per capita income in France, 35 per cent of the Belgian figure, 60 per cent of the German figure and a seventh of per capita income in America”. From the point of view of diet, the daily average calorie intake per inhabitant was estimated at 2,437 kcal, only 14 per cent of which came from meat and sugar. At the same time, a survey of 1,847 “poor families” (in other words, those on local authority benefit) chosen from thirty-seven provincial capitals brought the food budget up to 62 per cent of total expenditure, a mere 11 points lower than the percentage for a family of share croppers in Romagna sixty years before! In particular, according to the survey, a “poor family” from the south consumed an average of 342 g of bread, 193 g of pulses and ingredients for soups, 34 g of meat, fish and cured pork products, 243 g of potatoes and vegetables, ¼ litre of wine and just over ½ litre of milk per day. Comparing this with the “theoretical subsistence diet” proposed by Voit for an *average worker* (a category confusedly defined as a “robust man” of 67 kg able to work 9–10 hours per day “notably more than a tailor, much less than a blacksmith and more or less the same as a bricklayer or a carpenter”) showed that the quantity of fats amounted to only a quarter of the daily requirement, that there was a theoretical deficit of 16 per cent and 19 per cent of animal and vegetable proteins respectively, and that even carbohydrates were well below the minimum quantities established.

In 1950, data were obtained on the diet of peasants in eighteen local authority areas in central Italy. The results give a picture of the qualitative composition of individual meals over the seasons and show a clear division and diversification according to work activities and above all seasonal availability, very little use being made of products bought on the market. In practice, peasants bought only *fish*, probably dried or salted (dried cod, herring, stockfish, anchovies). For the rest, the diet was based on products produced on the smallholding. The only meat came from one or more pigs, depending on the size of the family and the *means* of the owner and his bailiff. Sausages and cured pork products (more perishable) were eaten in winter, while ham was consumed when mature, in the summer following butchering. In winter, there were only two meals a day, halfway through the morning and halfway through the afternoon. Cabbage and *piadina*, polenta and beans, *tagliolini* and beans, marinated olives and bread and sausage and bread alternated on the table on weekdays. On Sundays there was pasta in broth and salami, sometimes macaroni. In spring, meals were enhanced with broad beans, artichokes, peas, fennel and seasonal fruit. On Fridays, but usually every day, there might be eggs. In summer, stuffed tomatoes, salad, green beans, pumpkin, potatoes and peppers accompanied potato gnocchi, macaroni, soup with noodles and on Sunday evenings, dried cod or herring. In autumn and above all on Sunday evenings, there was ham. Boiled potatoes were eaten at least twice a week and stuffed aubergines

and baked peppers on another two occasions during the week. The usual breakfast in this season was bread and grapes.

Abundance was foreign to this reality, or at least reserved for the very few, while others could only imagine it and conjure it up in dreams of “pasta and meat every day”, as happened, much more prosaically than in the “delights of the village of Cuccagna where the vines were tied with sausages and the rivers flowed with wine”, in *Aci Trezza* as described by Verga, or in the stories of hunger in a particular genre of literature from the 1900s that saw Corrado Alvaro and Leonida Repaci as its main exponents (Faccioli, 1973; Teti, 1990). Or as happened in the food reveries on which the majority of Italians had learnt to construct a world parallel to reality, sometimes indulging in a lucid and conscious dream, sometimes tragically prey to the schizophrenic hallucinations of pellagra. Thus while the Neapolitan seamstress Antonietta in Matilde Serao’s *Paese di Cuccagna* made do with three pennies – worth of fried fish, tripe soup or dried cod “in a reddish sauce heavily dotted with pepper”, there was nothing to stop her from dreaming of a jackpot in the lottery, enabling her to satisfy her “craving to eat meat, every day [. . .] meat and macaroni [. . .] morning and evening”. Thus while in the novel *Tibi e Tascia* written by Saverio Strati in 1959, the everyday reality was almost one of fasting, you could still imagine colossal blow-outs following a social and economic windfall: “I would eat till I burst. I would eat meat and eggs. I would eat sausages and fowl. I would eat kid, cheese and ham. I would drink monotonic and Greek wine . . . And if I could turn into don Michelino and don Michelino into me, then I would say: now how do you like going about barefoot and eating dry bread?” (Teti, 1976, 1990).

On the basis of the results of a survey of food consumption in Grassano (an agricultural centre in the province of Matera where in 1935 Carlo Levi spent the first part of his political confinement, describing the conditions of life of its inhabitants in his famous *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (“Christ stopped at Eboli”), *l’Inchiesta sulla miseria* (“Inquest on Poverty”) (1951–52) compared the daily diet of an average family in the region with the “theoretical subsistence diet”. Once again (the year is 1952), there is a deficiency with regard to animal proteins (-87 per cent) and fats (-20 per cent), and an overrepresentation of vegetable proteins (+26 per cent) and carbohydrates (+5.4 per cent). At Grassano, a “consumer unit” (i.e., a man aged over 18) was found to consume 842 g of bread and ingredients for soup together with 46 g of dried pulses per day, values above those recorded in a sample of 1,847 “poor families” (stationary at 480 and 22 g) and in figures illustrating the diet of a sample of Fiat clerical and manual workers (514 and 16 g). However, the inhabitants of Grassano ate 113 g less potatoes, vegetables and fruit than the “poor families” and Fiat employees. Also lower was the intake of fats (45 g as against 63 g for the “poor families” and 91 g for the Fiat employees) and animal proteins (only 5 g as against 19 g for the “poor families” and 49 g for the Fiat employees) (Ambrico, 1953–4, pp. 147–50).

Apart from these cases, meat, sugar and milk were still necessarily regarded by many Italians as luxury goods, an indulgence or a medicine, as was in general “everything which had to be bought”, even if this was just “a couple of kilos of meat for broth, necessary in the case of illness”. In Italy, an average of 12 kg per capita of sugar was consumed per year, in other words, half that consumed by a Frenchman and a third of that consumed by an Englishman. The 14 kg of meat consumed by each Italian in the space of a year were derisory with respect to the English average of 52 kg and the 67 kg of a Danish citizen. This is confirmed by the fact that 38 per cent of Italian families (in absolute figures, almost four and a half million!) never bought meat, although this of course did not mean that they did not eat home-reared rabbit, poultry, pork or mutton; 27 per cent bought meat just once a week and 15 per cent went to the butcher’s at least twice a week. About two million families bought meat three or more times per week, but although this category covered “habitual” customers, in reality, as was common practice when the use of the refrigerator was unknown, these customers bought only what was strictly indispensable for the daily needs, as and when required. Two sausages one day, a couple of grams of lard the next, some meat for broth one day, then the next, two ounces of sliced beef for the *growing* children (Pinna, 1953–4, pp. 15, 35).

Leaving aside nationwide statistics, there were still marked regional differences in consumption in general and food consumption in particular, although the pig represented “a public idol”, the only unifying element from Emilia to the Lucania (Capatti, 1998, p. 801). Compared to the north and centre, less bread, meat, fats and even fresh fish were eaten in the south. Consumption of milk, eggs and dairy products in the south was half that of the north and less than a third that in the centre. Only consumption of pulses, vegetables and fruit was higher in the south than in the other geographical areas. These differences, however, tended to diminish during the next few years. A survey by the “Istituto Nazionale di Statistica” (ISTAT) carried out in 1963–64 no longer showed significant differences among the four areas into which the country was divided (north-east Italy, north-west Italy, central Italy and southern Italy and the islands). However, there were obvious differences in consumption among the various occupational categories surveyed and, once again, consumption of animal proteins was noticeably low in the diet of farm labourers. This was a consequence of the fact that in the mere ten years or so since the *Inchiesta sulla miseria*, the geographical and occupational distribution of the population had been thrown into confusion as perhaps never before in the history of Italy. Between 1955 and 1971, more than nine million Italians were involved in a wave of internal migration, not just along the longitudinal south-north axis, but also in the form of a “multitude of movements, from hamlets to towns, from towns to provincial capitals, from one region to another, from the country to the city” (Ginsborg, 1989; Fofi, 1976). Peasants abandoned the hinterland to invade the coasts and coastal towns; whole villages were depopulated; scattered houses in

the sharecropping countryside were abandoned; the fragmented production of the smallholding was swallowed up by the single-crop density of the large farm. Mechanisation of agriculture, new urban conglomerates and industrial and tourist settlements changed the face of agriculture and the landscape, particularly in areas where sharecropping was once practised, in the suburbs and in the coastal belt. The primary sector dropped to under 20 per cent of the active population, while the secondary and tertiary sectors shot ahead.

The result was turmoil in terms of demography, settlement patterns, crops, the economy and, inevitably, the culture too, which also affected nutrition.

In terms of diet, in the fifties and sixties, consumption of meat, sugar, fruit and vegetables – together with non-alcoholic drinks – grew at rates higher than the average. In other words, we moved closer to consumption patterns already established in other European countries, although maintaining a certain distance. In 1960, per capita consumption of meat was still among the lowest in Europe by a long way, while cereal consumption was way above other countries. (Crainz, 1996, p. 133)

However, ISTAT findings in 1964 showed that a number of differences between north and south had disappeared. Milk, cheese and eggs appeared on the tables of all occupational categories; fruit and vegetables were no longer the prerogative of the south. And consumption of meat underwent a sudden and progressive rise throughout the 1960s and 1970s when, after centuries of mass deprivation, patterns of frugality and sobriety as genetic archetypes or necessities were abandoned.

Concluding: the Italian Way of Eating . . . Moderately

Poor diets in the turbulent first half of the twentieth century were surely not particular to Italy. Most Italians ate simply, monotonously and on the edge of insufficiency, just as masses of people did in many other countries. Nonetheless, two features under consideration here may suggest a specific Italian development with regard to diet.

First, there was the extremely slow improvement throughout the twentieth century, with an acceleration only during recent decades. Italy's leap from meagre to fat years may not have been unique, but it was undoubtedly sturdy and excessive, leaving the Italian working classes and middle classes around 1960 with a diet that did not differ much from that of the 1900s, but which was on the eve of the *abundant* diet of the 1970s. After, say, 1980, a new exemplary diet, inspired by an allegedly Mediterranean cuisine, was presented to the Italians (as well as to the whole West) as offering guarantees for health and beauty ideals; for many Italians, this exemplary diet of cereals, vegetables, fruit and oil was reminiscent of the poor nutritional conditions they had known for some decades.

Second, the poor diet up to, say, 1945, was not only justified but, moreover, valued by the middle-class and Fascist ideologies. Sobriety had to become a national virtue, which totally suited the policy of agricultural independence in the 1920s and 1930s. The glorification of bread (which was presented as perfectly suitable for the Italian metabolism!) was without doubt the key element in the propaganda. This continued propaganda for several decades shaped the Italian way of conceptualising diet because of the close bond between discourse and reality. Thus, the crude diet – in practice and theory – contributed to the formation of the Italian working-classes' identity during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Overall, the Italian example shows the power of the state (and in particular of the Fascist state), to use food (even poor, monotonous food) as a means of building national feelings that transcend social classes.

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A Bourgeois Good? Sugar, Norms of Consumption and the Labouring Classes in Nineteenth-Century France

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There was at first sight no reason why sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and publicist Georges D’Avenel should have come to the same common-sense appreciation of the connection between economic growth and sugar consumption in nineteenth-century France. Since consumption had soared from less than half a kilogram per head around 1800 to roughly 17 kilograms before the First World War (Figure 6.1), both men concluded that economic expansion and average sugar use went hand in hand. Periods of real-wage improvement led to significant rises in the sugar intake of the average French person: the 1880s, when mean sugar consumption rose by one third, and the 1900s when it rose by more than 40 per cent, attested positively to the link, while the morose 1890s, with their stagnant figures, substantiated the negative impact of falling real incomes on sugar expenditure. There was, however, ample room for disagreement. If D’Avenel and Halbwachs saw eye to eye on the economic mechanics behind the figures, they differed over their social significance. D’Avenel not only took the increase in sugar consumption as an indication of the general improvement of living standards in France, he also tended to construe it as a sign of the progressive convergence of ways of life. Halbwachs’ research led to the opposite conclusion, for it revealed the persistence of massive inequalities in French society as growth and decline in purchasing power were unevenly distributed across the social structure (Halbwachs, 1933, pp. 121–2; D’Avenel, 1913, p. 10, pp. 301–13; D’Avenel, 1895, pp. 807–8). Still, their common reliance on relative prices to explain consumption presupposed an implicit, and indeed unquestioned, view of sugar as a foodstuff and as a commodity: the scholar and the essayist both started from the assumption that sugar in itself was desirable.

Humanity’s putative sweet tooth turns the story of its search for sweetness into an obstacle race, where better production and distribution technology overcame barriers to the craving’s gratification. Many an historian’s explanation of the quantitative rise of sugar in the Western world over the last 250 years boils down to a question of supply. In the German version of this narrative, as related by Hans

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Figure 6.1 Estimated *per caput* consumption of sugar in France, 1831–1913 (in kilogram)
Sources: *Annuaire statistique de la France 1913* (Paris, 1913), pp. 109–11; FAO, *The World Sugar Economy in Figures 1890–1959* (Rome, 1961), Table 14, pp. 11–13

J. Teuteberg and Günter Wiegelmann, the inundation of markets with beet sugar in the second half of the nineteenth century ensured its becoming an object of mass consumption. If there was a cultural motive driving the process, then it was an imitation of court society first by the bourgeoisie, then by the working class, although the popularisation of sugar inevitably transformed gains in quantity into losses in prestige (Wiegelmann, 1986, pp. 135–52; Teuteberg, 1986, pp. 153–62). Such a cultural component supposedly even stimulated the growth of substitute goods like saccharine, whose meteoric though frequently obstructed ascent in Europe throughout the 1920s Christoph M. Merki described as a poor man's ersatz sugar: it satisfied the natural appetite for sweetness at a lower price per sweetening unit while providing an impression of living up to bourgeois standards (Merki, 1993, especially pp. 56–70). No one less than Sydney Mintz predicated his contextual account of sugar consumption by the English working class on its natural desirability, although he emphasised both its substantial caloric contribution to the diet of labouring families and their stubborn adaptation of it to their own customs of sociability (Mintz, 1986, pp. 74–150). Moving a step up in the English social hierarchy, Ralph Austen and Woodrow Smith argued that the cultural significance of an indulgence in sweet things included an element of respectability by which the sober bourgeoisie could be distinguished from the profligate aristocracy and the endemic drinking of the workers (Austen & Smith, 1990, pp. 104–6).¹

A Bourgeois Good?

Parsimony characterises the economic variables in case studies tracing the diffusion of sugar or its substitute in society, whereas richness of anthropological detail distinguishes inquiries into its appropriation by consumers. While the former model builds on the assumption of conformity of motives leading human beings to long for the same article of merchandise and hence presupposes a single, timeless culture by which a society is integrated, the latter grants groups at least partial cultural autonomy to make sense of their lives within an historically constituted set of power relations. Yet when it comes to sugar, both approaches regard its progress in terms that highlight the inevitable metamorphoses of its tremendous emblematic significance into substantial, if symbolically banal, economic value; in short, they delineate sugar's descent from the status of a luxury into that of a decency and eventually into a necessity, the position to which its natural appeal to humanity would have predestined it in the first place. This presupposition needs looking at more closely, and probing what has seemed to be an unproblematic expansion of sugar consumption in nineteenth-century France leads to a considerably less straightforward account of its move toward an assured place in the French food repertory.

Because the technical and material qualities of a commodity never exhaust its many, often fortuitous uses and unforeseen appropriations, Joseph Schumpeter and Werner Sombart long ago encouraged the scrutiny of a thing's everyday uses and the frequently tortuous path of any innovation in the conquest of a market (Schumpeter, 1912, pp. 133–4; Sombart, 1911, pp. 331–2, 341). Such a research design avoids the pitfalls into which recent work on consumption has occasionally fallen. Indeed, the editors and some contributors of three recent anthologies have bemoaned the lack of social histories of food and feeding (de Grazia & Furlough, 1996, p. 8; Teuteberg et al, 1997, pp. 19–21; Tenfelde, 1997, pp. 245–66). The prevailing geographical approaches to foodways tend to homogenise patterns of consumption. In their search for a region's identity-forming foodstuffs, they overlook both the processes that brought "typical" meals into being and the different contexts that have endowed them with various socially determined meanings. This is not to gainsay the accomplishment of geographically determined research in establishing regional food repertoires, but it is seldom that an effort to construe the very notion of region (its frontiers, components) precedes such studies and saves them from overlooking social discontinuities.²

An episode in revolutionary Paris opens this investigation of the place and uses of sugar in everyday life. Note that the perception of sugar as a luxury, a qualitative judgement that historians tend to deduce perfunctorily from its scarcity, appeared in contemporary discourse only in the 1860s, precisely at the moment when manufacturers began to worry about relative overproduction. Anxiety about underconsumption aroused the French sugar lobby into accusing state authorities of impeding trade not merely by overtaxing the merchandise, but by labelling it a

dispensable, non-essential consumer commodity. However, scapegoating so-called sumptuary laws proved inadequate in the face of working-class indifference to sugar, whether as a sweetener of beverages or as an ingredient of pastries and jams. Sugar's role as an identity marker became salient in the 1890s. In its various guises it connoted a bourgeois food. Working-class antagonism to sweetness functioned as a building block in its lived identity and social experience beyond its objective class position (to which Halbwachs paid a great deal of attention). From the industry's point of view, this adverse attitude could result only from unenlightened prejudice, to be eliminated by a sustained campaign to educate the public. And no institution funnelled information better to a large number of people than an army in peacetime.

The Uses of Sugar

The commotion of January 1792 seemed incongruous, and to call it a riot ridiculous, to the weekly *Révolutions de Paris*. After almost three years of revolutionary rule and an on-and-off experience of subsistence shortages, a gathering of unidentified Parisians had accused a few grocers of hoarding sugar to profit from a price hike that it had suffered as a consequence of the agitation on the West Indian sugar islands. The crowd coerced the grocers into selling sugar at the original price, and later threatened to plunder what turned out to be empty colonial warehouses. Ever intent on proving their proximity to popular concerns, the Jacobins of the *Société des Amis de la Constitution* passed a resolution to forgo the consumption of sugar until its price had fallen to a pre-turbulence level, and then discussed whether to extend the decision to cover coffee. Interestingly, the demand also involved the members' wives, who were encouraged to help households renounce sugar just as their American counterparts had been instrumental in the boycott of tea after the English Crown had levied taxes for ostensibly malicious purposes in the 1770s. The editor of the *Révolutions de Paris* regarded the importance of tea as a customary beverage in the British North American colonies to be out of all proportion to the status of sugar as a treat in Paris, and he regretted the "gratuitous noise" over such a minor issue. After all, he concluded, it was not "the real people" who purchased sugar in calmer times. "The people are too poor to engage in such acquisitions." The fuss looked like a plot to discredit the revolutionary government, and if anything its short-lived nature revealed the modest import of sugar to the lower classes of the French capital (*Société des Amis de la Constitution* 1792; *Les révolutions de Paris* 133 [21–28 Jan. 1792] and 134 [28 Jan.–4 Feb. 1792]: 150–2, 158 [quotation], 227–8).³

Even Louis Sebastien Mercier's much, but rather misleadingly, quoted observation on the Parisian morning habit of drinking a bowl of *café au lait* before work confirms the weekly's impression. The appeal of milk to artisans astounded the

peripatetic explorer of urban goings-on, yet he noted the libation's tonic effect as well as its filling capacity; it presumably kept craftsmen going until nightfall and allowed for an economy of one meal a day. But Mercier also observed that "sugar does not dominate" the coffee (Mercier, 1783/1994, vol. 1, pp. 878–9). The survey of net imports to the French capital that scientist Antoine Laurent Lavoisier (1743–1794) conducted on the eve of the Revolution lends quantitative verisimilitude to impressionistic evidence. Per capita consumption stood at 5.3 kg per year or roughly 15 g a day, an amount that the French population as a whole only attained by the 1860s. This was certainly enough to sweeten a cup of milky coffee, although the nobility's disproportionate share in total consumption ought to militate against statements about sugar as an indispensable commodity for which the Parisian *sans-culottes* took to the streets.⁴

By the late 1810s, when academician Châteauneuf repeated Lavoisier's observations on a broader basis of information, sugar availability in Paris had increased by 70 per cent. The capital, whose population amounted to less than 5 per cent of the country's total number of inhabitants, consumed over one quarter of its imports. Average annual consumption rose to 7.531 kg per Parisian, which left at most a scant 600 g of sugar per head for the rest of the French population (Benoiston de Châteauneuf, 1820, vol. 1, pp. 73–7, 105–6). This discrepancy between Paris and the rest of France persisted up to the First World War, even if its size diminished over time. The general pattern of inequality disturbed the economist Lavergne, who commented in the 1850s that the quantity, and certainly the variety, of the average food intake in Paris exceeded consumption in all other European cities, "but the food of the average French peasant is almost always inferior to that of our neighbours. Neither meat, wheat nor wine grace their tables; rye, buckwheat, potatoes and water, these are the foods that nourish one-third of our population" (Lavergne, 1856, pp. 408–10). These circumstances were not conducive to sugar consumption. The fact hardly escaped the spokesman and editor-in-chief of the newly founded trade publication of the beet sugar industry, the *Journal des fabricants de sucre*: "Half the French population cannot afford sugar," he claimed in 1858. "It is relegated to the rank of a pharmaceutical drug. Most backwoods blacks in Cuba or Brazil consume more sugar than our wealthiest peasants and our best-off workers. Fifteen to twenty million French people [out of 36.6 million] have no knowledge of sugar" (Dureau, 1858, p. 8). It was a state of things that he made his life's mission to change.⁵

The project stalled over the following two decades even though the mean values of sugar consumption climbed from 5.4 to 7.2 kg. Aware of the fact that averages always hide as much as they reveal, economist Le Pelletier de Saint-Rémy carried out an empirical estimation of the distribution of sugar consumption in 1875. Families with servants, whom he considered middle class and whose consumption habits he investigated, consumed on average 21.5 kg per year. He reckoned

generously that one quarter of the French population (or approximately 10 million people) fell into this social category. He then subtracted their consumption from France's total sugar use, only to discover that "three-quarters of the French obtain at most one kg per person – hardly enough to sweeten their herbal tea" (Le Pelletier, 1877, pp. 216–19). The latter remark hinted at the curative power of sugar since tea never really caught on with a majority of the French. The comment's baseline, however, conveyed an altogether more dispiriting message for the sugar industry: while those French who consumed sugar rather freely in the 1850s increased their mean intake through the 1870s, those who hardly ever saw it halfway through the century did not get to taste any more of it twenty years later.⁶

Philanthropists, reformers and sociologists did not have to look hard to find corroborating data. Armand Husson outlined the entire spectrum of consumer possibilities in his assessment of Parisian conditions in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. These covered the whole range from the "luxurious town houses where tea and all kinds of sweets are consumed in quantity, to the households of the poor where sugar is served only very exceptionally" (Husson, 1875, p. 394). When physician Villermé toured France to assess its workers' physical shape in the 1830s, even the relatively well-off operatives in Alsatian textile mills did not count sugar among their foodstuffs (Villermé, 1840/1989, pp. 111–2, 255–6, 381–3). The four members of the Parisian carpenter's family in Frédéric Le Play's pilot study of living standards consumed 2.875 kg of sugar per head in 1856 (*Ouvriers*, 1st series, 1857, vol. 1, p. 49). If urban artisans occasionally consumed small quantities of sugar even when material conditions were extremely bad, according to Louis Reybaud, peasant families mostly made do without it (Reybaud, 1860, pp. 1027–8; Reybaud, 1862, pp. 718–19); not entirely, though, for the pollsters took note of the therapeutic uses to which sugar was put in the countryside. Farmers in the Nivernais (centre of France) and the Pyrenees used sugar "as medication" and "only in a few exceptional instances" (*Ouvriers*, 1st series, 1857, p. 131, 187; *ibid*, 1875, vol. 5, p. 29). Among such exceptions figured the occasional gift. As an old resident of the department of the Doubs in eastern France recalled in the 1930s, "Up until 1870 and even 1890, sugar was expensive and scarce and was used very little. Half a pound or a pound of it brought to a person on their sickbed or to a woman in labour was a handsome present" (Commission de recherches collectives 1936, microfilm 5, village of Boussières, Dept. of Doubs).⁷

Classifying Sugar

But was it only scarcity that mattered to those who gave occasional gifts of sugar at baptisms and weddings or considered their slightly sweetened milk coffee a treat (Dureau, 1858, pp. 8–9)? Circumstantial evidence reveals indifference and even hostility to sugar among the popular classes. To them, the notion of sugar as

a luxury was foreign. Le Pelletier, for one, had hit upon what he termed a super-annuated tradition among peasants that prohibited sugar consumption by children: “Of paramount importance is salt, the exterminator of intestinal worms *par excellence*,” and so pinches of salt spiced up coffee (Le Pelletier, 1877, p. 219). Of course, sugar appeared as a condiment in official gastronomic discourse before the 1870s. The *Dictionnaire des alimens* of 1826 recommended sugar in small doses as a seasoning because it stimulated digestion, but warned at the same time that immoderate consumption would lead to physical debility (C*** Q***, 1826, pp. 312–13). The rule buttressed popular indifference because it implied that sugar had better not enter the vigorous stomachs of working people whose daily activities required them to eat hearty victuals like dark bread and red meat. Advise literature repeated the same doctrine through to the 1870s, keeping sugar safely on the margins of the popular diet (Lombard, 1855, vol. 2, p. 338; Fonsagrives, 1876, pp. 697–8).

This culinary classification brings us back to the hierarchical ordering of sweets and their consumers. Refined sugar as a primary product formed about 45 percent of all the sugar imported to Paris by the late 1810s. The rest was added to drinks, chocolate, pastry and candy (Benoiston de Châteauneuf, 1820, vol. 1, pp. 74–6). While sugar as such was a possible condiment on the tables of the rich or poor, sugar bakers engaged in a line of work that catered specifically to bourgeois taste. The “*confiserie bourgeoise* excels in the confection of appetisers and of the myriad forms of candy to decorate tables and to be relished in after a copious meal,” Husson noted in 1875 (Husson, 1875, pp., 392–3, 397; see also Lombard, 1855, p. 203; Vinçard, 1863, pp. 344–7). Workers did not indulge in artisanal products but were able to buy, if anything, industrially produced *dragées*. The general taxonomy corresponded quite neatly to Parisian reality in 1872, when the typical labouring family in Georges Renaud’s study of living costs in the capital (Renaud, 1873, pp. 176–7) consumed 10 g of sugar per day and per person (or 3.65 kg per year). This was somewhat more than Le Play’s findings of fifteen years earlier, but it still only added up to a spoonful to sweeten the morning cup of coffee. Yet it lagged far behind the mean annual per capita consumption in Paris, which stood, according to Husson’s calculations for 1865, at 11.3 kg at a time when the French national average was 6.2 kg. These numbers confirm that most of the growth in sugar consumption was due to traditional, affluent consumers who revelled in the increasing availability of culinary delicacies.

The persistent and deep fault line between consumers of different social position preoccupied sugar manufacturers and grocers. In 1864, Lunel’s *Guide pratique de l’épicier* set out to close the gap between rural and urban consumers (Lunel, 1864, p. 111). It was not pure philanthropic consideration that moved Le Pelletier to call on the government to promote consumption by legislative means and turn sugar into “the poor man’s luxury”, a fairly inappropriate euphemism by which to

designate the manufacturers' goal, which, of course, was to popularise the commodity's status throughout France (Le Pelletier, 1877, pp. 203–4). The egalitarian pitch, however, blended nicely with the democratic ideals of the newly minted Third Republic. Its finance minister had indeed declared the government's intention not to tax essential foodstuffs – bread, meat and salt (quoted in Roederer, 1909, p. 110). Sugar's absence from the list reflected its status as a non-essential comestible. Its inclusion as a necessary foodstuff was the industry's goal throughout the First World War.

The working people's indifference to sugar proved the major hindrance to the sugar industry's success. About 120 men and women – Parisian labourers and lower-level staff – had little use for sweetness according to a study by a team from the Laënnec Hospital. “A startling revelation of our survey,” the authors wrote in 1906,

[A] revelation both economic and alimentary, is that we show the degree of discredit in which the people hold dried pulses [lentils, dry beans and peas], rice, sweet dishes and cakes. The people completely disregard the nutritional value of the latter and even treat them as *futilities* and *friandises*, good only for the rich . . . The culpable ignorance of the high nutritional value of desserts and cakes extends to sugar, which has not secured a place in the workers' diet. Instead of considering it a food, they merely use it as a condiment; the proof is that even those among our respondents who consume sugar do so in very small quantities, of one lump (seven grams) or half a lump throughout an entire day.

The results of the survey surprised even its designers. While three-quarters of the men, and 60 per cent of the women declared that they liked and regularly drank coffee, only a quarter of the men and one-fifth of the women consumed sugar on a routine basis. Less than one-fifth of the men and 30 per cent of the women were fond of pastries. The scientists first linked this indifference with traditional prejudice against sugar as a seasoning with little substance. Exploring the attitudes among the workers and lower-level staff, the physicians discovered that a majority of their subjects declared an actual dislike of candy, pastry and chocolate. Class prevailed over gender when it came to opinions of sugar and actual consumer behaviour. The members of the Parisian lower classes justified their partiality by the assertion that sweets “spoil the appetite” and so lead to a weakening of the body. Women, furthermore, whom the Laënnec team expected to fancy candy (*bonbons*), were little inclined towards them. Their attitude was that, “all they [sweets] do is spoil your teeth,” a view the physicians rather peremptorily rejected, thereby revealing their own biased, gendered, bourgeois image of consumption (Landouzy, 1906, p. 4; Landouzy et al, 1905, pp. 18–19, 23–7).

That such distaste for sugar and sweets should occur among the labouring classes in well-provisioned, high-living Paris bode ill for the industry. Observations of

soldiers' dispositions pointed toward a less affirmative rejection of sweetness among working people. Still, the reports on attitudes to food among privates in the army sounded like variations on the same theme. The working classes had little use or appetite for sugar. One army expert remarked that labourers from construction sites all over France, foundry operatives in the mining regions and porters from the central market in Paris (*Halles*) simply ignored sugar and sweet dishes (Gérardin, 1907, p. 478). Another description read, "In fact, the soldier has no real aversion to sugar. At most he is indifferent to it. As a child he may have tasted sugar candy, but since then no habit has kept him accustomed to this substance, which he considers a trifling *friandise*. To persuade him that sugar nourishes as much as certain other foodstuffs is not an easy matter" (Perrier, 1907, p. 927). So, when it came to explaining working-class reluctance to consume sugar, scientists and manufacturers fell back, like chemists Alquier and Drouineau, on the notion of popular prejudice. "Although hard to fathom," they wrote in 1905, "it is still very difficult nowadays to persuade even relatively better-educated contemporaries that sugar is not just a flavouring condiment like salt, pepper or mustard" (Alquier & Drouineau, 1905, vol. 2, pp. 3–4). The campaign for the stomachs of working people was therefore to be fought around the popular representation of sugar first, its functional flexibility and sweets second. Of course, to reform eating habits meant to correct class habits because of their central position in the constitution of social identity.

Introducing a Norm of Consumption

Energy was the watchword of the first battle, and the emerging European science of work gave a boost to the promoters of sugar consumption in France. The goal of reducing fatigue among the working population led the new researchers to collect scientific data in the 1890s on the influence of nutrition on physical performance (Rabinbach, 1986, pp. 476–82, 492). Empirical studies of hikers, long-distance runners, bicyclists and horses proved that an increased amount of sugar in the dietary regime of men and animals stimulated exploits and enhanced endurance. The large quantity of rapidly assimilated calories that it supplied seemed to prove beyond a doubt that sugar was a food in its own right (Grandeau, 1903; Alquier & Drouineau 1905, vol. 2, pp. 17–45). It was "dynamogenic", as one physician exclaimed (Marmotte, 1904, pp. 341–58), while another advocate of increased consumption expected sugar to join the rank of bread and wine in the French shopping basket as a consequence of its "superior nutritional power" (Joly, 1907, pp. 241–67; see also Alquier, 1908, p. 21; Roederer, 1909, p. 110).

Instruction on sugar's quality as a food constituted the second, longer-term battle in the campaign. An aura of scientific legitimacy distinguished this diffusion of information from ordinary advertising. It reassured the sugar lobby of the

worthiness of their cause, for as late as 1895 its main journals had worried about the capacity to extend overall French sugar consumption (*La sucrerie indigène et coloniale* 45, 19 March 1895, 302, and *ibid.*, 45, 9 April 1895, 394; *Journal des fabricants de sucre*, 22 Aug. 1894, 1, and 16 Jan. 1895, 1; see also *L'Épicerie française*, 15 Jan. 1893, 2). Neither the sugar lobby nor scientists whose aim it was to rationalise human conduct by adjusting food intake to work requirements took sugar consumption for granted, and hence the main feature of the publicity drive lay with its emphasis on inculcating a taste for sugar among the lower classes. In 1899 Grandeau noted the importance of enlightening the misguided consumers on the positive contribution of sugar to physical well-being; he went so far as to suggest that only a grassroots movement convinced of sugar's deserved place in the French repertory of ordinary, everyday foods would eventually induce the government to revise its tax scales and stop classifying sugar as a luxury product. This mobilisation, he reckoned, would require an educational build-up (Grandeau, 1899, p. 6, 22–3; see also Grandeau, 1903, pp. 11–12, 44–6). Seven years and a successful international conference aimed at lowering export subsidies and incidental excise duties later, Alquier and Drouineau explained that it would be “an illusion to rely on falling sugar prices in the fight against old errors and for the reorientation of ideas [about sugar] . . . Under no circumstances does a lower-price regime exempt us from educating the poor about the high energetic and nutritional value of sweets. As long as there are doubts about this, consumption will not reach the desired level,” which the two chemists put at a whopping 70 to 80 g per day or 27.4 kg a year and per person (Alquier & Drouineau, 1905, vol. 2, p. 71).⁸

The problem with the program was that education alone would not change the eating habits of the popular classes. Lifestyles evolve very slowly, and the assault on working-class patterns of consumption ran foul of their inertia. Reformers knew about the durability of everyday behaviour. Physician Landouzy reckoned that “Empiricism governs human eating habits . . . , and routine is the rule” (Landouzy, 1909, pp. 1, 20–6). If sugar consumption stood at 35 kg per head in England and 28.6 kg in the United States in 1900 and hence vastly exceeded France's 11.7 kg per head at the turn of the century (FAO, 1961, Table 14, pp. 111–13), an observer with close ties to sugar interests slyly remarked that the respective culinary inclinations lent themselves more or less easily to an inept addition of sugar: “In Paris, we do not eat rabbit with gooseberry jam, nor duck with apricots.” He concluded, “it will certainly take more than a year to accustom the French to a sweeter diet” (Gradel, 1902, p. 16). The trick, then, was to take advantage of sugar's multiple uses as a sweetener, graft it onto ordinary products, and then manoeuvre these updated, altered foodstuffs into traditional meals.

A frontal attack on bread aborted rather quickly when the proposal to add sugar to regular loaves and *baguettes* was branded an outlandish scheme; although a

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Figure 6.2 Sugar, the indispensable energiser, advertisement from the 1900s (Collection of the Centre de documentation du sucre, Paris)

sure winner given the tremendous quantitative and symbolic importance of breadways in France, flavoured, sweeter bread clearly ran counter to French taste (Roederer, 1909, pp. 16–17, and in general pp. 18–26). Other propositions involved adding sugar to beverages: beer and wine for adults, milk for children, none of which took hold. More modest, but more realistic ideas to circumvent the constraints on innovation in food habits concentrated on the fringes of meals. The major focus here was on jam and coffee. Because bread and dairy products played a major role in the working-class diet, fruit jam on a slice of bread could complement, or substitute for, the buttered bread eaten north of the Nancy-Paris-Brest line, and bread and cheese among urban workers in general (Albaux, 1902, pp. 9–10; Gradel, 1902, pp. 14–15; Rolet, 1912, pp. 173–81).⁹

Coffee was an altogether different matter. It was certainly part of the diet of the working classes, although it is difficult to evaluate whether there was a uniform pattern across France. As early as the 1830s, the Société Industrielle de Mulhouse, a textile factory, provided its workers with coffee – albeit without sugar (Villermé, 1840/1989, pp. 111–12). Two generations later, David Manérini lamented the habit of Parisian artisans and workers of finishing their lunch with a small cup of black coffee, a routine gratification seemingly shared by Parisian seamstresses, too (Manérini, 1889, p. 57; Benoist, 1895, p. 232; Pelloutier & Pelloutier, 1900, pp. 116, 214). These observations notwithstanding, a co-operative canteen in the city of Lyons served only thirty-seven cups of coffee for a daily average of 1,084 midday meals in 1896 (Brelay, 1897, p. 58). The survey of better-off urban working-class families by the United States Commissioner of Labor assessed household purchases of coffee at 2.4 kg per person in the late-1880s whereas the inquiry into costs of living in various European countries and the United States of America by the English Board of Trade in October 1905 showed lower-class households in France buying only small quantities of coffee; they purchased about 3 kg per person per year (United States Commissioner of Labor, 1891; Résultats de l'enquête, 1905, pp. 10–11). Physicians Du Mesnil and Mangenot reported in 1899 that the poorest among the Parisian working-class families (or 261 of their 814-household sample) started their day with “a cup of watery coffee in the morning, most often without sugar, into which they dunk a piece of bread” (Du Mesnil & Mangenot, 1899, p. 153). While peasants in Brittany, reputed to be one of the most backward regions in France, were drinking coffee by the First World War (Desportes, 1913, p. 110), these observations and figures indicate that constraints on expanding domestic sugar consumption by adding it to coffee were still quite strong around 1900.¹⁰

How then were innovations to be introduced at the margins of eating patterns? Because a greater supply of the commodity did not automatically ensure increased consumption, other channels of taste formation and mechanisms of habituation were needed. The army offered the most efficient way to reach a large number of men, to guide their eating habits, to inculcate new doctrines, and to convince by

example. As early as 1876, the military administration made coffee and sugar a mandatory component of the soldier's daily food ration. The results of the experience proved inconclusive, apparently as a consequence of the low quality of sugar supplied to the men, who disliked the flavour it gave to the coffee (Ravitaillement, 1988, pp. 709–10; Latruffe, 1894, pp. 230, 234–42). This failure did not discourage the sugar lobby. They went on calling for the integration of their energy-laden food in the army's meal planning. Some of their representatives were candid about their intentions. The introduction of refined sugar, fruit jam and other sweet foodstuffs in military provisions would boost the popularity of sugar in France, L. Albau declared in 1902, and help reduce a relative overproduction that was dumped at a heavy cost in the British market. Health experts expressed concern for the army's performance and the soldiers' physical hygiene (Albau, 1902, p. 11; also Alquier & Drouineau, 1905, vol. 1, pp. v–ix). Others again combined profits and public health, arguing the benefits of increased popular consumption for agriculture and industry on the one hand, and for families and individuals on the other. Léon Gérardin believed in the demonstrative power of the military experience, that once soldiers had felt the positive contribution of sugar to their energy and endurance, they would demand it for their daily nourishment. The request, incidentally, would encourage working-class wives and homemakers to update *their* superannuated attachment to sugarless recipes and set off an upswing in private consumption (Gérardin, 1907, p. 483; Alquier 1906, part 2, p. 4).¹¹

While army commissioners controlled the effective consumption of sugar, any increase in the privates' daily rations remained an unfulfilled hope. Their regular breakfast contained 21 g of sugar in the 1870s and up to the First World War (Tableau comparatif des dépenses, n.p.; Ministère de la Guerre, 1894, p. 55; "Consommations," n.d., n.p.; Labbé, 1910, pp. 200–4).¹² Some changes occurred nevertheless. The average yearly per capita consumption in France leapt from roughly 11 kg at the turn of the century to around 17 kg before the First World War, and these gains were not limited only to those classes whose diet had already included sugar as a regular, sizeable feature above the national average. The population in the countryside experienced an expansion of sugar consumption that was marked in the memories of some among them. The 1936 inquiry into popular eating habits found people who remembered the advent of fruit jams just before the War, but their home production was, according to the correspondent from the rural department of Ariège, "very recent" (Commission de Recherches Collectives, microfilm 1, Dept. of the Ariège, and Village of Cressanes, Dept. of the Allier, microfilm 11, Village of Marquillies, Dept. of the Nord). Du Maroussem's ethnographic investigations of a peasant and a winegrowing family in the early 1890s indicated a mean consumption of less than 1.5 kg per person (*Ouvriers*, 2nd series, 1892, vol. 3, pp. 37, 103). Twenty years later, Halbwachs found that it had

reached 3.3 kg. But his figures also revealed the stark inequalities in sugar consumption. Artisans and workers in Paris consumed on average twice the quantity of those living in other urban areas (Halbwachs, 1914–15, pp. 64–5, 75–82). Even large, albeit better-off working-class families in the capital provided their members with a yearly average intake of 12.3 kg (or a daily 34 g) of refined sugar in 1910 whereas per capita consumption in families of specialised, trained urban working men hovered around 10 kg per year or 27 g per day according to the English Board of Trade. That, of course, was still a far cry from (or about 50 per cent of) France's average consumption of approximately 15 kg (Résultats de l'enquête, 1905, p. 11; Bertillon, 1911, pp. 263–78).

Conclusion

The institution by the turn of the twentieth century of a norm fixing the quantity of sugar required to fuel human activity entailed an attempt at transforming sugar from a latent, but at times self-consciously brandished marker of social identity into a measure of civility. The one-dimensional standard dislodged sugar as a commodity that crystallised class awareness and cultural difference. It elevated the consumption of sugared foods to a desirable, indeed natural aspect of human behaviour. To prefer other flavours was to reveal one's inferiority. Of course, the campaign to increase popular sugar consumption in France blended several motives. However, it is noteworthy that a genuine desire to improve the diet of the working people, the pursuit of profit, and upper-class condescension towards those at the bottom of the social pyramid all construed popular eating habits as deficient. The joint verdict was one of popular ignorance, covering a lack of basic education (indifference to sugar as a calorie-rich foodstuff), an inability to make rational consumer decisions (the failure to allocate revenues in ways that provide the cheapest combination of necessary foodstuffs), and a deficiency in elementary *savoir-vivre* (a taste for red meat and potatoes rather than fish and green peas). While this interpretative harmony shows the predominance of social hierarchy in the (legitimist, authorised) classification of foods and their consumers, the fact that members of the working classes displayed no qualms in assuming their own definition, and use, of sugar as a non-essential condiment proves not only the strength, but also the autonomy of their culture. Before the First World War the refusal to use sugar and sweets according to bourgeois prescription was part of an identity-affirming pattern of consumer behaviour by women and men of the French working classes. This goes to show that tastes that we tend to take for granted, that we casually construe as manifestations of innate inclinations, that we spontaneously attribute to human nature, do have a history. And the processes of their acquisition reveal them as issues that expose the fault lines in society.

Notes

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1. The price-consumption connection also appears in Burnett, 1989, pp. 14–15, 114, and in a vein similar to Mintz’s approach in Sandgruber, 1986, pp. 177–81.
2. For a subtle, amusingly rendered case study that pays attention to space, time and class in the uses of a regional food item, see Lewis, 1989.
3. These two installments of *Les révolutions de Paris* contain accounts of the sugar riots that can be complemented by *La Municipalité de Paris aux citoyens 1792*, La Municipalité de Paris 1792. For the context, see Mathiez, 1927/1973, t. 1, pp. 29–49.
4. Mercier quoted by Mathiez, 1927/1973, pp. 30–1, and Braudel, 1979, vol. 1, p. 294; Lavoisier’s results are conveniently reprinted and commented on in Benoiston de Châteauneuf, 1820, vol. 1, pp. 106–7. Statements about the importance of sugar to lower-class Parisians in Stein, 1988: 10, 164; Austen & Smith, 1990, pp. 100–1.
5. Here I should mention the lack of even partial surveys on the consumption of honey, an alternative sweetener, in the French countryside.
6. These figures are confirmed by a detailed account of the expenses (as well as the revenues) of a bourgeois household in 1894: per capita intake of sugar was 22 kg, and the family bought fruit jams and lots of pastry, see Beaurin-Gressier, 1895, pp. 234–48.
7. See also Carru, 1909, esp. 2; for a summary review of the data collected by Le Play and his collaborators, see Dauphin & Pézerat, 1975, pp. 537–52.
8. The conference met in Brussels in 1902.
9. Physicians Alquier & Drouineau, 1905: vol. 2, pp. 71–83, declared it their goal to raise a worker’s daily sugar consumption to 200 g, which would have provided one fourth of the prescribed number of calories in their diet.
10. I have some concerns about the relevance and representativity of the 1891 survey by the United States Commissioner of Labor, which compel me to use it here only sparingly in spite of its richness. A fine analysis of the survey by the Board of Trade is Saunier, 1975; on Parisian living and working conditions, see Berlanstein, 1984: especially pp. 46–8.
11. France introduced compulsory general military service in 1905, prior to which the sons of wealthier families had been able to buy their way out of military service.
12. This quantity was, we should note in passing, somewhat larger than the recommendations that nutritional handbooks handed out on the best diet of children

and adolescents; their ideal food regime, especially in school cafeterias, was to contain between 10 and 15 g of sugar (Labbé, 1910, pp. 151–9).

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Old People, Alcohol and Identity in Europe, 1300–1700

A. Lynn Martin

The depiction of January in the fifteenth-century calendar of *Les Belles Heures de Jean Duc de Berry* shows a young man and an old man sitting back to back. The young man, representing the new year, drinks wine from a cup. The old man represents the old year; his cup is empty.¹ The vigour of the young man and the regenerative powers of wine combine to symbolise the renewal of the earth in the new year following the dead season of winter. The decrepitude of the old man and the cup empty of the life-giving liquor symbolise the mortality of both humans and the solar year. A similar analogy occurs in ‘The Reeve’s Prologue’ by Geoffrey Chaucer (1958, p. 122). The old reeve complained,

Certain, when I was born, so long ago,
Death drew the tap of life and let it flow;
And ever since the tap has done its task,
And now there’s little but an empty cask.

The identification of an old man with an empty cup and an empty cask was misleading, however, because in late medieval and early modern Europe the old continued to consume alcoholic beverages as they had throughout their lives. Indeed, the consumption of alcohol formed part of the identity of the old. A more appropriate symbolic representation of the situation comes from John Russell’s *Boke of Nurture* when describing the ornamental devices that could be used to accompany the four courses of an elaborate fish dinner. Accompanying the fourth course of wine and spices was old man winter ‘with his lorkys grey, febille and old’ (in Burrow, 1986, p. 29).

Alcohol in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe

This study proceeds from my research into drinking behavior and attitudes toward drinking in late medieval and early modern Europe, from about 1300 to about 1700, focussing on England, France and Italy. Despite the differences between

the wine-drinking south and the ale- or beer-drinking north, these countries shared a drinking pattern which resulted from the functions of alcoholic beverages. The functions reveal that the role of alcohol then was far more important than it is today. Alcohol was a necessary component of most people's diet. People drank a significant proportion of their daily intake of calories. They drank water of course, but in the period before safe alternatives such as tea and coffee many people began their day with a draught of ale or wine at breakfast and continued drinking throughout the day. Alcohol was also the ubiquitous social lubricant; every occasion called for a drink. Drinking accompanied the important rites of passage of birth, marriage and death, the festivals of the agricultural calendar and of the liturgical year, and royal, civic, religious and fraternal rituals. Contrary to Karl Marx, religion was not the opiate of the people, alcohol was. Alcoholic beverages often provided the only refuge and the only comfort from the harsh realities of daily life and the even harsher catastrophes and disasters that were too often a feature of existence in the past. Finally, alcohol was an important part of the medical pharmacopoeia. Alcohol, especially wine, was used as a solvent for many medicines, and the medical consensus was that alcohol was necessary to maintain good health. Although some individuals practiced complete abstinence, alcoholic beverages were so fundamental to the fabric of society that advocates of temperance at most promoted moderation in drinking. Moderation of a sort: an Order of Temperance established at Hesse in 1600 restricted its members to seven glasses of wine with each meal (Austin, 1985, p. 203).

The amount and type of alcohol consumed varied over time and place. The English were traditional drinkers of ale, in rather small amounts when increasing population put pressure on agricultural resources in the first half of the fourteenth century, as much as a gallon or more a day in the period following the Black Death (Dyer, 1983, pp. 209–10; 1988, pp. 25–6). The introduction of hops into the brewing process during the fifteenth century created a new drink called beer, which gradually replaced ale as the beverage of choice for the English. In 1587 William Harrison noted in *The Description of England* (1968, p. 139) that ale had become an 'old and sick men's drink'. Towards the end of the seventeenth century the daily per capita consumption of beer in England was about one quart (Clark, 1983, p. 209). England imported large amounts of wine from the Continent and even produced small amounts of its own wine of dubious quality, but its vineyards suffered a well-deserved decline in the sixteenth century. A decline in the consumption of mead occurred in the same century, while cider was a popular drink only in the south-west.

France also demonstrated variations over time and place. Although the cultivation of the vine extended further north than it does today, France was divided between the beer-drinking north and the wine-drinking south. The consumption of wine was widespread throughout all classes during the Middle Ages. For

example, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's peasants of Languedoc, both male and female, consumed one and a half to two litres a day (1976, pp. 63–4). The peasants of Languedoc continued to drink large amounts of wine in the early modern period, but elsewhere population pressures after 1500 resulted in a decline in consumption among peasants so that by the seventeenth century workers in towns were drinking more wine than their counterparts in the countryside (Dion, 1977, pp. 472–3). Mead was not a popular drink in France, and cider was popular only in the north-east. The drinking pattern of Italy had few variations over time and space. Ale, beer, cider and mead were not popular drinks, and wine ruled throughout the peninsula, resulting in daily per capita consumption levels of one to two litres for adults (La Roncière, 1981, p. 183; Pini, 1989, p. 27). In contrast to the annual per capita consumption of 60 litres of wine in modern Italy, the figures for late medieval and early modern Italian towns ranged from 200 to 415 (Fiumi, 1953, p. 231; Pini, 1989, 133–5 and n. 316). The widespread consumption of spirits in England, France and Italy was a development of the eighteenth century; their use before then was more as a medicine than as a beverage. Also occurring in the eighteenth century was the rapid rise in popularity of tea and coffee. These developments combined to end the traditional drinking patterns.²

The alcoholic content of the drinks is difficult to establish. Peasants and the poor often had to drink an inferior wine made by pouring water onto the pressed grapes and then fermenting this liquid. The resulting drink, known in France as *piquette* and in Italy by various names such as *mezzo vino*, *acquarello* and *annacquato*, was very weak. As for the strength of normal wine, the estimates of historians range from 5 to 11 per cent, which compares to the 11–13 per cent of modern table wines. A safe conclusion would be that the wines were weaker than modern wines but probably not by much. The ale and beer could be as strong as or stronger than modern equivalents, except for small ale or beer that was made by pouring water over the wort after removing the first brew and fermenting it.³ Jean-Louis Flandrin (1983, p. 312) has argued that French drinkers mixed water with their wine and as a result were moderate drinkers, but in the thirteenth century the Franciscan friar Salimbene (1972, p. 139) had condemned the French for drinking their wine straight. As already noted, peasants of Languedoc consumed a litre and a half to two litres of wine a day, while at Carpentras in the fifteenth century the annual per capita consumption ranged from 210 to 390 litres, depending on the quantity of the vintage (Stouff, 1970, p. 92). Given those who were too young to drink much and those who were too poor to drink much, and given the women who usually did not drink as much as men, the remaining adult males in Carpentras drank gargantuan amounts. If the peasants of Languedoc and the citizens of Carpentras were mixing water with their wine, they were drinking a lot of water.

Other types of evidence indicate that the drink was not weak. A catalogue of contemporary complaints of drunken behaviour would fill a volume. As I have

documented elsewhere, moralists everywhere condemned their compatriots for their drinking behaviour and drunken comportment, and travellers frequently commented on the inebriates encountered on their journeys at inns, taverns and guesthouses throughout Europe (Martin, 1999). An example of the former is from *The Anatomie of Abuses* by the Elizabethan Puritan Phillip Stubbes (1972, pp. 13v–14), who attacked the behavior of ‘maltworms’ at alehouses: ‘how they stutter and stammer, stagger and reel to and fro like madmen, some vomiting, spewing, and disgorging their filthy stomachs; others pissing under the board as they sit’. One of the best examples of a traveller commenting on drinking behavior was Fynes Moryson, who published his *Itinerary* in 1617 (pp. 81–162). The Saxons and the Bohemians topped Moryson’s list of drunken drinkers, then came the Dutch, the next group comprised Germans and Poles, closely followed by the Scots and the Irish, with the French and the Italians edging out the English and the Swiss in their moderation. Similarly, two poems, one Italian and the other English, described the gradual increase in drunkenness with each additional drink of alcohol. The Italian poem by the Florentine Domenico di Giovanni, called *Il Burchiello* (1404–49), noted that the first drink sharpened his wits, but by the fifth his head was steaming (Muscetta & Ponchioli, 1959, p. 106). According to Francis Thynne’s poem (1876, p. 65), the first drink was pleasing to the palate, the fifth heated the brain, and the tenth made a person ‘worse than mad’. In short, the evidence dealing with the strength of alcoholic beverages leads to the conclusion that they were not exceptionally weak drinks and that people, including the old, could get drunk.

The Old in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe

In 1982 Peter N. Stearns (p. 1) stated, ‘Old age, as a field of history, remains shockingly untended.’ Today he might omit the ‘shockingly’, while Stearns himself has forsaken the old for the fat (1998). In contrast to the understandable interest in the history of women, the trendy interest in the history of children, and the exotic interest in the history of ‘the other’, the history of the old remains a neglected field, with the exception of their experience in the Middle Ages, whose historians have recently produced some excellent studies. One of the reasons for the neglect of the old is the unattractiveness of the topic. Gerontologists had theorised without any empirical foundation that there existed a golden past for the old, a golden past that stood in stark contrast to the grey present. In the past the old enjoyed a position of reverence and a comfortable retirement, dispensing the wisdom born of years from the ease of the rocking chair or the warmth in front of the fire, or so argued the gerontologists. Historians discovered a quite different picture of poverty, ridicule and contempt, or at best an ambivalence dependent on class, power and status. Those old men and women who held positions of authority and/or who managed to maintain control of their resources could wield power and demand grudging respect and

deference – but not much more (Overing, 1999, p. 216; Stearns, 1982, pp. 2, 7; Thomas, 1976, pp. 233, 245–6). In short, the study of the old in late medieval and early modern Europe is depressing, and instead of revered patriarch and honoured matriarch the old could experience the second childhood as portrayed in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (2,7): 'sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything'.

The ambivalent nature of the attitudes toward the old is best illustrated in Georges Minois' book entitled *The History of Old Age: From Antiquity to the Renaissance* (1989, pp. 209–302). In his chapter on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Minois argues that differential rates of death from the Black Death and subsequent outbreaks of the plague favoured the old, while children and young adults died in large numbers. The resulting demographic, social, economic, political and cultural superiority of old people worsened intergenerational conflicts. According to Minois (1989, p. 235), the situation resulted in degrading depictions of the old: 'Old women . . . became witches and the incarnation of evil. Old men were, at best, objects of pessimistic meditation on the passage of worldly pleasures'. In the chapter on the sixteenth century, Minois argues that the same intergenerational conflict existed, but now he suggests a new cause for what was essentially the same situation. Instead of differential death rates, Minois (*ibid.*, p. 249) believes that the cultural ideals of humanists and courtiers led to the idealisation of youth and the condemnation of the old; 'the Renaissance railed against old age, blackening, demeaning, and damning it.' After analysing the contradictions between rhetoric and practice, Minois concludes (*ibid.*, p. 301) with an amazing assertion: 'The theoretical attitude of the humanists and courtiers towards old age was no more than a front, . . . concealing their real attitude towards the old, which was one of sympathy rather than sarcasm.'

The difficulty for historians is to penetrate the rhetoric, especially because of rhetoric's potential impact on practice; the literary degradation and ridicule of the old could reinforce tendencies to degrade and ridicule them. The rhetoric could also increase a sense of otherness among the old and thereby intensify their feelings of isolation and vulnerability (Nitecki, 1990, p. 110). The rhetoric could even produce its own contradictions and ambiguities. The most obvious example of this developed from notions about the mental capacity of the old. As summarised by Herbert C. Covey (1991, p. 61, see also pp. 19, 36), 'older people have generally been judged on a continuum ranging from deep wisdom to profound senility and foolishness'. Variations across class and gender created other sources of contradictions and ambiguities. As already noted, the rich and powerful could enjoy a relatively comfortable old age, while the vulnerable and miserable poor faced an old age that was doubly vulnerable and miserable. As for gender, according to Shulamith Shahar (1994, pp. 160–4) the old male body had a neutral valuation, but the old female body, especially the poor old female body, had a negative valuation and was considered harmful as a result of the inability to eliminate the dangerous

and destructive menstrual blood after menopause. In spite of the discrepancies between rhetoric and practice and the resulting contradictions and ambiguities, some historians argue that the modern bias toward youth is not a recent development but was a feature of late medieval and early modern Europe (Covey, 1991, p. 60).

Alcohol and the Old: The Reality

In most modern societies young males between their mid-teens and mid-thirties are the major consumers of alcohol (Marshall, 1979, p. 454). Although the same pattern occurred in late medieval and early modern Europe (Bercé, 1976, pp. 22–3, 25, 164) many opportunities existed for the old to drink; their cups and casks were not empty. Because alcoholic beverages were a fundamental part of most people's diets, people of all ages consumed large amounts of alcohol on a daily basis. Even the old who were poor had occasions to drink, especially during the rites, festivals and rituals that usually featured the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Municipal, religious and royal officials distributed alcoholic beverages during rituals and festivals as a matter of course; fountains of wine were popular devices in Italy, France and even England. The most appropriate occasion for the aged poor to receive a drink was at funerals. Men and women of substance often arranged in their wills for the distribution of food and drink to the poor during funeral services. For example, 1,440 gallons of ale were provided at the funeral of Lady Margaret de Neville in 1319 (Kershaw, 1973, p. 139). An analysis of wills made in 1594 at Aix-en-Provence reveals that 5 per cent of the testators directed that their funerals include the distribution of wine to the poor (Dolan-Leclerc, 1979, p. 107). The custom of providing drinks at funerals continued in Protestant England. In 1658 Adam Martindale, a Presbyterian minister, agreed with his two siblings to serve 'good meat and strong ale in plenty' when their eighty-year-old father died, and they treated friends and relatives at a tavern following the funeral (Smith, 1978, p. 212). The aged poor could also receive drinks on a more regular basis in the daily rations of charitable institutions such as hospitals. For example, an analysis of the distribution of wine or cider at French hospitals demonstrates a daily allowance of 0.35 to 0.75 litres (Bennassar & Goy, 1975, p. 411).

Pensions, maintenance agreements and bequests provided a direct source of sustenance, including drink, for the old. In England people could receive a pension called a corody and, in the words of John Fortescue, 'have honeste sustenance in ther olde dayis' (*The Governance of England*, quoted from Rosenthal, 1990, p. 175). In the fourteenth century John Underwood of Deeping purchased a corody for £100 from the abbot of Peterborough to provide for himself and his wife Isabella in old age. They twice weekly received eight gallons of the better ale from the abbot's cellar (Harper, 1983, p. 96).⁴ When old age forced the retirement of the prior of Blyth, his corody stipulated three gallons of ale a day plus an annual

payment for wine (Rosenthal, 1996, pp. 108–9).⁵ Maintenance agreements that surrendered land from one peasant family to another required the recipient to provide the previous holder with a stated amount of food. In 1407 John Whytyng, when on his death bed at Wymondham, surrendered his land in return for the support of his widow; in addition to food and drink she was to receive sixteen bushels of malt annually, enough for 2.6 pints of ale a day (Clark, 1982, p. 311). Elsewhere men made arrangements in their wills on behalf of their widows. In the rural community of Santena in Northern Italy the wills stipulated typically 246 litres (five *brente*) of wine a year (Levi, 1988, pp. 68–72). Husbands in Piedmont left instructions in their wills on the amount and type of wine for their widows, some stipulating both wine and *annacquato*, others the equivalent of over two modern bottles of wine a day (Patrone, 1981, p. 436). In 1441 at Barjols in Provence the widow of Jean Quinson received a generous annual supply of 360 litres of wine (Stouff, 1970, p. 230). The old received their supply of alcoholic beverages in other ways as well. As an old man working in Rome, Michelangelo (1963, II, pp. 77, 102, 137, 165, 183) relied on his nephew Lionardo to send him supplies of his beloved trebbiano wine from Florence. When seventy-three years old, Galileo had his own wine, access to the cellar of the Grand Duke, and gifts from secular and ecclesiastical princes but still arranged to purchase forty flasks ‘of the finest varieties’ (Camporesi, 1993, pp. 54–5). An old servant woman in Ludovico Ariosto’s play *La Scolastica* (1975, p. 318) managed to satisfy her craving for wine when she found her master’s jug of malmsey in a cabinet, which perhaps indicates that old servants pilfered the odd drink now and then. In the seventeenth century Edmond Verney (1892–1899, IV, p. 190) described how one of his tenants, ‘an old Man, at an Easter Communion drank up all the wine in the sylver Callice and swore He would have his Peny worth out of it: Being he payd for it.’

Alcohol and the Old: The Rhetoric

Regardless of the amounts consumed or the manner obtained, the propensity for the old to consume alcoholic beverages was proverbial. According to an old French proverb, ‘when the old man no longer wants to drink, one can put him in his grave’ (Rivière, 1982, p. 210). Another proverb proclaimed, ‘the young girl spends all of her money on prettying herself, the young man on gambling and banqueting, the old man on drink’ (Rivière, 1982, p. 214). As in proverbs, so in iconography; Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia* (1593) instructed artists to use an old woman to depict drunkenness (Covey, 1991, p. 42). Opinion was divided, however, on the suitability of old people drinking. In fact, some authors argued it both ways. In *The Praise of Folly* Erasmus (1941, pp. 25, 42) poked fun at the drinking of old women and at the old men who decreed that, ‘the highest pleasure lies in bouts of drinking’, while in his *Colloquies* he praised wine for its rejuvenating qualities (in Antonioli,

1983, p. 137). Similar beliefs in the rejuvenating and regenerating qualities of wine have had a long history. Plato had considered wine ‘the cure for the crabbedness of old age’; it permitted the old to renew their youth (Grivetti, 1995, p. 4). Medical opinion, discussed below, further developed Plato’s views, which became a popular theme with poets. For example, Remy Belleau (1528–1577) celebrated *The Vintage* by describing its effects on an old man; as soon as he tasted ‘this inspiring God,’ he began to dance (Aldington, 1931, p. 168). One seventeenth-century popular ballad called wine the cure against age, and another singled out claret for making old age become youth (Sandys, 1848, pp. 33, 80). Not just wine but other alcoholic drinks had reputations for salutary effects on the old. In the seventeenth century John Evelyn praised cider for helping the old live longer (in French, 1982, p. 56), and John Taylor claimed that ale heated ‘the chilled blood of the aged’ (in Emerson, 1908, II, pp. 225–6).

Andreas Cappellanus in *De amore* noted another reason for approving the consumption of alcohol by the old; an old man had ‘no pleasures left in the world except food and drink’ (in Burrow, 1986, p. 161). If he had no teeth, the list was reduced to drink. As a result, some writers argued that alcoholic beverages were suitable for the old since they could have few other indulgences. Drink could provide refuge and comfort from the harsh realities of old age. This argument received full treatment in Lorenzo Valla’s dialogue *De voluptate* (1433) through the words of the Epicurean Vegio. He praised wine for its benefits to all but especially to the old; when he himself became old, wine would be his ‘unique refuge’ (1977, p. 107). Michel de Montaigne (1958, p. 248) summarised the attitude of many: ‘drinking is almost the last pleasure that the years steal from us.’

In contrast to the authors who approved of alcoholic beverages for old people, other writers ridiculed the drinking old. In *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* Thomas More (1965, p. 66) noted that poets depicted the old as fools with a cup in front of the fire where they spent their time in ‘drivel and drink and talk’. Robert Burton’s depiction of the drinking old in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1651) was not flattering: ‘A drunken old woman drags a drunken old man, how they flock to the Tavern! as if they were born to no other end but to eat and drink’ (1938, p. 198). The effect of too much alcohol on the old provided further material for ridicule. An old English riddle whose answer was mead had a clue, ‘sometimes I cast an old fellow right to the ground’ (Hassall, 1962, pp. 157–8). In one of the plays of the *Commedia dell’Arte* an old man proved incapable of supervising his daughter because he was drunk all the time (Scala, 1967, pp. 179–80). Writers wishing to shame and to deride the drinking old could point to the bible and the story of Noah. After the flood Noah planted a vineyard, became drunk on the wine, and laid naked in his tent, where one of his sons discovered him (Genesis 9: 21–22). In *The Passion de Semur* (1981, p. 31), composed in the fifteenth century, Noah’s son pointed to his father and said, ‘what great ugliness! . . . what a joke!’

In Machiavelli's play *Clizia* (1961, p. 79), old Nicomaco proclaimed after a night of drinking too much that, 'this old age brings all the vices with it'. Of all the vices, writers associated the old with those of avarice, greed and gluttony (Covey, 1991, pp. 22, 51; Dove, 1986, p. 110; Tristram, 1976, p. 67). Among old people drinking and drunkenness were prominent features of these vices. According to Christine de Pizan (1989, p. 206), for example, old women might exchange the vices of youth for worse vices including gluttony, and especially gluttony for wines. An English sermon on gluttony delivered in 1635 echoed these comments by noting that, 'The vice and evil of the belly, intemperance in meats and drinks, is no way moderated, it is exasperated and encreased by age' (Chandos, 1971, p. 336). In short, although opinion was divided on whether the old should drink, the consensus was that the vice or the pleasure of drink was a feature of old age.

Alcohol, the Old and Medical Opinion

The consensus of medical opinion was that the consumption of alcoholic beverages, especially wine, was beneficial to the old. The doctors, who seldom agreed with each other, achieved a rare unanimity on the subject. Many doctors, however, promoted moderation and warned that the old could harm themselves if they drank too much. In his *Bulwarke of Defence againste all Sicknes* (1562) William Bulleyn claimed that excessive wine could bring 'fevers, fransies, fightyng' to old people (1971, p. 11). Similarly, John Pechey's *A Collection of Chronical Diseases* (1692) warned the old that too much wine could provoke attacks of gout (in Smith, 1976, p. 131). The apostle of moderation for all ages and not just for the old was the Venetian Luigi Cornaro. He advocated moderation in all things, especially diet, and argued that a long life would result from his daily regimen of consuming only twelve ounces of solid food and fourteen ounces of liquid, mainly wine. His longevity was his program's greatest recommendation for he died at the age of ninety-one (1475–1566). Significantly, however, he prescribed an increased consumption of wine for the old; two glasses at the age of forty, four at the age of fifty, and six at the age of sixty, which begs the question, did he drink twelve at the age of ninety? (Freeman, 1965, pp. 14–16; Porter, 1993, p. 60).

Arnold of Villanova, a Spaniard teaching at Montpellier, established the therapeutic qualities of wine in his *Liber de vinis* (about 1310). He argued that wine was beneficial to all, but especially to the old because of his belief in the Galenic idea that old age resulted from an increase in cold dry humours. Wine relieved the coldness and the dryness of the old (Freeman, 1965, p. 9; Lucia, 1963, pp. 101–4). Villanova influenced subsequent writers such as the Florentine humanist Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499). In his *Three Books on Life* (1989, p. 187) Ficino claimed that, 'a cold and hard old age is . . . warmed and softened by unmixed wine'. Villanova's influence and through him that of Galen were also evident in Gabriele

Zerbi's *Gerontocomia* (1489), the first printed book on the care of the old. Zerbi devoted an entire chapter on 'The Benefits of Wine in the Recovery of the Aged'. The chapter contained a long list of the benefits of wine, benefits that achieved cogent expression in the statement (1988, p. 132), 'a good wine not only fortifies the body's strengths in old age but also that of the soul, which it makes gay and jolly'. In *The Castel of Helth* (1541) Thomas Elyot likewise listed the benefits of wine and affirmed that, 'God dyd ordeyn it for mankynde, as a remedy againge the incommodities of age' (1937, p. 32). Many other writers praised the use of wine for the old, but Thomas Venner admirably summarised the benefits in his *Via Recta ad Longam* (1650). According to Venner, wine brought four 'excellent commodities' to the old: First, it corrected their coldness by heating them; second, it expelled their sadness and melancholy; third, it made them sleep well; and fourth, it eased their constipation (in Darby, 1979, p. 63).

The medical opinion on the benefits of wine apparently influenced popular practice. The poet Eustache Deschamps, although he was only about fifty-four when he died in 1400, wrote of the special care he required when he was becoming old. The care included having good wine, of course (1878–1903, V, p. 44). After recovering from a fall from the scaffolding while working on *The Last Judgement* at the age of sixty, Michelangelo (1963, II, p. 8) confided that he hoped 'to live another few years, since Heaven has placed my health in the hands of [my doctor] and in the trebbiano'. At seventy years of age, Galileo called his wine the 'good cheer' that was 'the best preservative of health and life' (in Camporesi, 1993, p. 53). The English clergyman Ralph Josselin (1976, pp. 642, 644) took Daffy Elixir, whose principle ingredient was brandy, when he became ill in 1683, then aged sixty-seven. It seemed to have an adverse effect on him, for, as he put it, 'it wrought much with mee,' and the next day he was seeing double. He turned instead to medicinal beer to help him sleep.

Sex and Alcohol

The connection between the consumption of alcohol and sexual activity has its roots in antiquity and continues to the present, as indicated by Ogden Nash's witticism, 'Candy is dandy but liquor is quicker.' In late medieval and early modern Europe alcohol not only functioned as a social lubricant; people considered it a sexual lubricant and believed that drinking led to sexual activity.⁶ The drinking old, however, were not supposed to have sex. The Christian doctrine that the sole purpose of sex was procreation combined with the Galenic doctrine that the cold dry humours of the old inhibited sex to create the opinion that sex was perverse and unnatural during old age. Old men who engaged in sexual activity were portrayed with disgust and humour, while sexual activity by old women, in addition to being disgusting and humorous, was inappropriate if not evil (Burrow, 1986, pp. 156–7;

Covey, 1991, pp. 111, 113, 125–6; Shahar, 1996, p. 168; Thomas, 1976, p. 243). These beliefs created another argument against drinking by the old. In *Il Tesoretto* Brunetto Latini (died 1294) linked the sin of gluttony to the sin of lechery and claimed that an old man with this filthy vice sinned twice (1981, p. 141). Some of the writers who advised a moderate amount of alcohol for the old did so as a result of their belief in the connection between alcohol and sexual activity. The Jesuit Leonard Lessius, for example, claimed that moderation would diminish ‘the fury of lust’ (in Smith, 1976, p. 140). The seventeenth-century almanac by John Vaux likewise condemned alcohol for ‘arousing unseemly lust in the aged’ (in Capp, 1979, pp. 118–19).

Just as writers who wanted to shame and to deride the drinking old could point to the biblical account of Noah, those who wanted to condemn the sexual activities of the drinking old could point to the story of Lot, who committed incest with his daughters after they got him drunk (Genesis 19: 32–37, in *Sermons*, 1839, p. 324). Some authors turned the old who combined drink and sex into an object of ridicule. In *Dictier des quatre vins franchois* (1465) Jean Molinet poked fun at the ‘old white-haired men with walking sticks’ and ‘old toothless crones’ who drank the wine from Reims, which had a reputation as a wine of lechery (1936–1939, I, p. 31). In the ‘Merchant’s Tale’ Chaucer (1958, pp. 387–8) ridiculed old January who married fresh young May. On the wedding night he drank spiced claret to heighten his desire but had to labour until dawn to consummate the marriage. Males imagined that widows had voracious sexual appetites, which of course would be yet more voracious after drinking. An illustration of this belief occurs in Chaucer’s ‘The Friar’s Tale’ (1958, p. 317); when the summoner knocked on the gate of the widow,

‘Come out,’ he said, ‘you old inebriate!
I’ll bet you’ve got a friar or priest inside!’

San Bernardino’s advice to widows not to drink well was a reflection of these attitudes (Origo, 1962, p. 68).

According to some authors, no connection existed between the drinking old and sexual activity. Their message was alcohol without sex for the old. Marsilio Ficino (1989, p. 189) advised those who had reached the age of fifty to ‘avoid the Venereal act’ and to attempt to obtain ‘the greatest possible amount of blood and spirit, . . . and wine especially refreshes the spirit’. Others, such as the Epicurean Vegio in Valla’s dialogue (1977, p. 107), urged the old to turn to wine when ‘the pursuit of Venus’ was no longer possible. At the age of seventy-three Galileo defended his indulgence in wine by noting he saved so much in his other ‘corporeal tastes,’ including Venus (in Camporesi, 1993, p. 55). At the other extreme both Erasmus (1941, p. 25) and Castiglione (1959, p. 249) ridiculed old men for preferring drink

to the company of women and the pleasures of Venus. For the old it was a case of damned if they did and damned if they did not.

The Sociability of Drinking

Drinking was a social and a sociable activity in late medieval and early modern Europe. The proverbial gregariousness of the old reinforced the sociability of drinking; among the old drink provided an opportunity and an occasion to meet with friends. Michelangelo (1963, II, pp. 120, 165) liked to share his precious trebbiano with friends; in 1556 at the age of eighty-one he wrote to his nephew that he could no longer do this since all of his friends were dead. An illustration of sociable drinking among the old comes from an English ballad dated the late seventeenth century; *The Old Man's Wish* included a barrel of sherry to drink with friends (*Roxburghe*, 1880–1890, VI, p. 508). Significantly, an anonymous pamphlet published at Paris in 1702 and entitled *Anti-Cornaro* attacked Luigi Cornaro for recommending a strict diet for the old and thereby isolating them from the sociability of the table, from friends, and from civil society. ‘Whosoever will desire such a life, let God grant it to him’ (in Troyansky, 1989, pp. 111–12).

Before the seventeenth century people did much of their drinking during festivals, rites and rituals in the public space of streets, squares and village greens in a promiscuous mixing of ages, classes and sexes. Beginning in the early modern period a shift occurred in the sociability of drinking from public space to the relative privacy of taverns and alehouses. In England the older form of sociability was evident in such traditions as the church ales, as John Aubrey nostalgically recalled in his ‘Wiltshire’ (in Hackwood, 1909, p. 52):

There were no rates for the poor in my grandfather’s days, but for Kingston St. Michael (no small parish) the church ale of Whitsuntide did the business. In every parish is (or was) a church-house to which belonged spits, crocks, etc., utensils for dressing provisions. Here the housekeepers met, and were merry, and gave their charity. The young people were there too, and had dancing, bowling, shootings at butts, etc., the ancients sitting gravely by and looking on.

The decline in public drinking tended to isolate the drinking old, for in addition to being male space, alehouses and taverns were primarily young space. An analysis of the age of customers at Parisian taverns in the eighteenth century indicates that only 2 per cent of the men and 4 per cent of the women were over sixty (Brennan, 1988, p. 151). Similarly, few old people patronised English alehouses, but Peter Clark (1983, p. 127) suggests that this was in part a reflection of demography, since the old constituted only a small proportion of the population.

Whatever the level of patronage, the old and especially widows often operated alehouses and taverns in England. Some of the widows had taken over the husband’s

job when he had died, and many poor widows received permission to operate modest establishments as a means of earning a living and thereby relieving the local poor rates of the burden of their support. Despite beliefs about the sexual voracity of widows, another reason for widows working as keepers was the authorities' fear that young female keepers could turn the alehouse or tavern into a house of ill repute (Bennett, 1996, pp. 56–7). As a reflection of these fears, in 1540 the mayor of Chester ordered that no woman between the ages of fourteen and forty could be an alehouse keeper (Laughton, 1995, p. 200). The fears were also reflected in a painting by Quinten Massys entitled *Ill-Matched Lovers* (about 1515/1525) that depicts an old man attempting to seduce a young woman in a tavern. The coarse ugliness of the old man contrasts with the fresh beauty of the maid; while he fondles her breast she steals his money purse (Covey, 1991, pp. 132–3). According to a fifteenth-century English sermon, old men were no longer capable of seduction and instead just sat in the tavern and boasted of previous conquests (Owst, 1961, p. 439). More pleasant than this elderly braggadocio was Franco Sacchetti's fourteenth-century story (1925, II, pp. 105–7) about an old man sitting in a tavern at Florence drinking a trebbiano wine that was 'good and clear, the color of gold.' 'Oh, workers!' he said, 'Blessed be you who worked these vineyards . . . If it were not for you, which wine could we ever drink?' When a friend seized his precious trebbiano and drank it, there followed a pleasant exchange of jokes.

**TO VIEW THIS FIGURE PLEASE REFER TO THE
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Figure 7.1 'Ill-matched lovers', painting by Quinten Massys (Washington National Gallery, A.M. Bruce Fund, 19711.55.1, Copyright National Gallery)

To state the obvious, the most notable identifying feature of the old in late medieval and early modern Europe was their age and the accompanying physical deterioration. Apart from this, the portrayal of the old was ambivalent with some writers praising their wisdom and others ridiculing their senility; some venerating and others denigrating their behaviour. The reality of existence for the old was likewise ambivalent, with a favoured few enjoying comfort and power and the majority suffering deprivation and hardship. Throughout the praise, ridicule, veneration and denigration and during the comfort or hardship the old's use of alcoholic beverages remained constant, one of the few aspects of both the reality and the rhetoric of the old that did not change. The association of the old with alcohol was a cultural construct, and it was also a social construct as a condemnation of a group that was allegedly non-productive. The portrayal of the drinking old was also ambivalent; alcohol could be one of the elderly's few remaining vices or few remaining pleasures. Although young men were the major consumers of alcohol in late medieval and early modern Europe and were consequently identified with drinking, alcoholic beverages likewise formed part of the identity of old people. To the many functions of alcohol in late medieval and early modern Europe could be added another, that of identifying the old.

Notes

1. Limbourg brothers, early fifteenth century, Cloisters Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
2. All of these comments on alcohol receive extended treatment in the introduction to my book on *Alcohol, Sex, and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*.
3. See Chapter 2 of my *Alcohol, Sex, and Gender* for an extended treatment of this topic.
4. Harper states 'beer' instead of ale, but this must be a mistranslation.
5. Rosenthal likewise states 'beer' instead of ale.
6. I document these beliefs in Chapter 3 of *Alcohol, Sex, and Gender*.

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Old People, Alcohol and Identity in Europe, 1300–1700

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Part III
National Identities

**The National Nutrition Exhibition:
A New Nutritional Narrative in
Norway in the 1930s**
Inger Johanne Lyngø

At the innermost end of the Oslo fjord, where sea and land meet, lies Oslo City Hall, a building which both physically and symbolically represents a new and modern Norway. Old city neighbourhoods were torn down to make room for a new monumental building which would “bolster the city’s reputation and mark its status as the capital”. The cornerstone was laid in 1931, and in the years to follow Oslo’s citizens saw a new majestic building rise with two distinctive towers taller than all the other city buildings. It was “a dream and a poem about a better and more beautiful city” which was being realised, as one of the city newspapers put it when the decision to commence building had finally been reached (Kjeldstadli, 1990, p. 23). Entering the building was like stepping into a “fairytale”, another newspaper proclaimed when it reviewed the first event arranged in this new building *Den Nasjonale Kostholdmesse. Planmessen* (The National Nutrition Exhibition. The Plan Exhibition) (*Nationen* (The Farmers’ Party Newspaper), 23 May 1936). During a few weeks in early summer 1936, according to the organisers, the exhibition took the entire city by storm. There were posters everywhere, on trams, busses and trains, in the shops and hotels, while taxis flew pennants and post offices stamped millions of letters with: “Visit the Plan Exhibition 28 May – 17 June 1936. Oslo New City Hall”.¹ There was music in the streets, and in the same way that the great exhibitions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries constituted bread and circus for the broad masses and the educated elite (Pred, 1992), this exhibition also aimed to be entertaining and educational for the public at large.

The executive committee saw something “symbolic” in the fact that the focus and the underpinning idea of the exhibition would be launched from this new and as yet unfinished building, and alluding to familiar motifs from Norwegian folk tales – into the mountain, the giant and the little boy – one of the city newspapers describes the experience of entering the new main hall of the city in the following way:

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Figure 8.1 The exhibition's emblem – the giant – as he was presented on a poster for the exhibition when it was in Elverum (rural woodland community). Underneath the giant we can see the following text: 'The Exhibition at Elverum will show you what has been done and what can be done to create more work, security and good health in our country. It is in your interest to pay a visit – for study purposes or for your entertainment. It has much to teach us, farmers, workers and city folk alike.'

The giant was drawn by Harald Damsleth (1907–1971), a well-known commercial artist and illustrator in the inter-war years in Norway. He was responsible for the decorations and the Norwegian pavilion at the New York World Fair in 1939. During the Second World War he became virtually the official designer for the NS party (Nasjonal samling (National Assembly, the Nazi party in Norway)), and after the war he designed book covers (Okland, 1996, p. 76).

Repro: Arthur Sand, Department of Culture Studies, University of Oslo

The National Nutrition Exhibition

Like a huge grey mountain Oslo New City Hall rises in front of you after you have been allowed inside the gate. You feel like you are the little boy about to venture into the cave of the giants. This sense of adventure persists after you have entered. The cavernous blue hall opens with the giant in the background, who with a spade in the one hand and a fish in the other symbolises the exhibition which is being held here. And everywhere you turn there are marvellous colours and sights to see (*Nationen*. [The Farmers' Party Newspaper], 23 May 1936).

Indeed there was something unreal about it all, entering into the building was like entering another world – a *magic world* – with a blue cloth sky opening over a huge room, and with the symbol of the exhibition – a huge giant holding a fish in one hand and a spade in the other – shining in silver and blue serving as the backdrop for all the carved figures, the photo montages and the kaleidoscopes on the walls. Birds were singing and the cuckoo cuckooed (via gramophones and loudspeakers), all of it underlining “the bright and optimistic atmosphere” of the exhibition (*Arbeiderbladet* (Social-Democratic Newspaper), 26 May 1936). The giant was described as a “beautiful symbol” – effectively placed behind the lectern – which in the glare of the spotlights threw a “shimmering sunlight” over all the speeches and presentations given during the three weeks that the exhibition lasted. The colours and the light reinforced the impression of sun and beautiful weather, of summer and festive moods, as did the illuminated showcases with their many bold colours (*ibid*). The newspaper reviewers were captivated by the size, the light and the colours – blue, translucent, almost transparent – not only was it a fairy tale, entering this building was like entering another room, a *holy* room, where the message was displayed in the glow, the light and the colours.

Building and Exhibition, Form and Content, Words and Images

Whether it was the building or the exhibition which created the sense of something grand – like a riveting fairy tale or something holy – is difficult to say, as here it is difficult to distinguish the building from the exhibition. A characteristic feature of the grand exhibitions is that they were also huge construction projects which attempted to imbue themselves with distinctive and imaginative symbolic expressions: Crystal Palace in 1851, the Eiffel tower in 1889, Grand Palais in 1900 and the giant statue of Stalin at the Moscow exhibition in 1939. In a Nordic context, the Stockholm exhibition in 1930 particularly stands out for such magic, and in later times it has lived on as the very symbol of modern Sweden, a “programme for progress” (Pred, 1992) which let “things teach (the Swedes) the lesson of modernity” (Löfgren, 1990, p. 21).

Compared to the other Nordic countries, Norway was not a great nation of exhibitions (Rudeng, 1995). There have been exhibitions of course, and exhibitions

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Figure 8.2 Oslo New City hall as it looked on one of the many exhibition posters. The text on the poster encourages people to come to the exhibition. The exhibition's 'beautiful emblem' – the great giant – has been given a place on the poster together with the text: 'A Self-Reliant Nation'. The exhibition has not been studied by Norwegian historians, and it is not generally known that the first event in Oslo New City Hall (the building where the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded annually) was a nutrition exhibition.

Repro: Arthur Sand, Department of Culture Studies, University of Oslo

and fairs were in many ways also a common feature, especially during the inter-war years. However, with a few exceptions, Norwegian exhibitions have not left distinctive traces when it comes to buildings, architecture and town planning. So it was in this case too, as the building itself already existed. However, when the executive committee saw something “symbolic” in the fact that they were introducing the exhibition’s “unifying and constructing idea” from this new, as yet unfinished building (in fact Oslo City Hall was not officially opened until 1950!), it was obviously referring to familiar figures of speech; just as with the classic great exhibitions, the building and the exhibition were connected. Form and content are not to be clearly distinguished from each other; words and images belong together. This is also the perspective of this paper. By focusing on the form – the *appearance* of the national diet – essential features of its nature, or content, also emerge. The building, the exhibition and diet belong together, and will be considered together.

This chapter emphasises that the national diet was not particularly national in the sense of being Norwegian. This diet was first and foremost scientifically connected to *new* scientific ideas. “The new diet,” as it was stated at the exhibition opening, “must also take into account the new hygiene requirements.”² What were the new hygiene requirements, what did they refer to and how were they transformed culturally into a Norwegian context? This article explores some of the relationships – the web of narratives – that the exhibition was a part of. This web consists of a number of narratives, small and large, implicit and explicit, all according to which perspective one is looking from. The most important of them all, and the one which will be the focus of the discussion in this article, is the narrative of vitamins. Bearing this in mind, during the inter-war years there was a comprehensive propaganda campaign – an enormous mobilisation – for a new and improved diet, of which the National Nutrition Exhibition is only one of the many expressions. The propaganda was also supported by studies proving that “development” was also going in the right direction (Rustung, 1940).³

Until fairly recently, cultural approaches to natural science have constituted not only a scarcely explored area, but also a field which has virtually threatened the scientific order, and according to Barry Barnes and Steven Shapin, this has been the case for both the natural sciences and the social sciences (Barnes & Shapin, 1979, p. 11). When they wrote this in 1979 they were uncertain as to how later development would be, while in the years which have since passed, the outcome has in many ways been as they hoped: descriptive and analytical studies of science have become a separate research field. These studies, which are still controversial, have largely focused on cultural studies of science and politics, and less on how science is integrated into everyday life (Cooter & Pumfrey, 1994). In this respect the two cultures have remained the two cultures. The latter approach is particularly fruitful in relation to the cultural history of food. Ever since the breakthrough of

modern nutrition science in the middle of the nineteenth century, this knowledge has greatly influenced everyday culture, not as new technology, but as a new way of thinking which in turn has impacted on culture and practices, particularly at the everyday level. “When science and the art of cooking first collaborate” was the title of one of the many papers presented at the nutrition exhibition, a title that suggests something about this issue. In many ways this also focuses directly on the core of identity issues, the interplay between external and internal affairs, between the great issues connected to science and politics, and the internal and individual ones connected to the practices and experiences of everyday life. In the tension between these levels, new cultural identities are created, shaped and tested.

The material for this article, which as well as the exhibition itself includes popular science writing and magazines, will be considered an arena where meaning is created. In such a perspective, language does not place labels on a reality which has identity and meaning prior to and independently of what is communicated, but rather what is communicated – the form, objects, words and images – creates and constitutes the reality which appears. Bearing this in mind, form is not subject to content, words and images go together. If it is accepted that cultural approaches to science are fruitful, this also has consequences for the status of the representations, as Barnes and Shapin put it:

it is a mistake to imagine representations of natural order being, as it were, *constructed* by examination and then direct rendition of reality, and then being *used* in a social context. Representations are not first constructed, and then assessed, and then used. As historians, all that we encounter is use. Representations are constituted and reconstituted, assessed and reassessed, continually, in the process of use. Accordingly, they cannot be studied by methods which assign them independent, inherent characteristics (of meaning, or implication, or truth) prior to their use (Barnes & Shapin, 1979, p. 16).

The Exhibition

The great exhibitions have been called the real pilgrimage sites, temples of modern life with their display of persons, objects and events. However, in this respect the nutrition exhibition was different. This was not an exhibition of objects, no goods were displayed, nothing could be purchased, and even though food was prepared – more than 40,000 dishes – the National Nutrition Exhibition was no common demonstration fair, but a “pictorial display of statistics”. Professionals in the advertising branch, who were important actors in this project, described it as a “breakthrough in exhibition techniques” (DNKM, 1936, p. 51). Figures, pictures and posters – all of them “dynamically” displayed – spoke about a new and modern Norway. This technique was not unique, as the Stockholm exhibition six years earlier had featured a special section on *Sveariket* (old Swedish for Sweden) where

The National Nutrition Exhibition

facts and figures showed the development of modern Sweden (Pred, 1992). In this sense, the display was just as new and modern as the building and the “giant” who had moved into the hall. The main difference was that the National Nutrition Exhibition exhibited a new way of thinking, by presenting a new and improved diet.

The exhibition featured a historical frieze showing the life and history of the Norwegian farmer, focusing on important events, including Norway establishing its democratic Constitution in 1814 with a large representation of farmers in the national assembly. “This was when the farmers marched into the political arena” one of the titles exclaimed (DNKM, 1936, p. 30). However, the exhibition was not retrospective as the long historical lines merely served as a backdrop. Primarily growth and development were highlighted, pointing to what such a poor and marginal agricultural country like Norway had accomplished within a brief period of time. During the last fifteen years *everything* had improved. The little *boy* who had ventured into the cave had grown into a giant, as big as the “beautiful” giant symbol of the exhibition. “We can if we will” the newspapers boasted. “We are a small but energetic people” were the proud words displayed in the lobby leading to the exhibition itself. Journalists wrote how they were caught up by “the enthusiasm of being Norwegians”. We see (my underlining) what we have accomplished in all the various areas, and it gives us a national self-esteem which is of “inestimable importance”. As the advertising industry put it, the exhibition was a success: it had been, as it said in the little pamphlet, “national experience” (ibid, p. 51).⁴

Much had improved, but it was still not good enough. Only 2.8 per cent of the country’s area had been cultivated, one of the posters at the exhibition proclaimed. Another poster showed a man with a long-handled scythe, with the following text: “We need to exploit opportunities. Just as large an area as that which is now cultivated could be cultivated. That will give jobs, and enhance health and safety” (ibid, p. 31). This text points to another important topic, public health, which had also improved. Infant mortality had declined and average life expectancy had risen, military recruits had grown taller, as had schoolchildren. All of this was interpreted as indications of improved living conditions in general and of changes in nutrition habits in particular. However, in the 1930s this was no longer sufficient. New indications were found which were interpreted as signs of poor living conditions and inadequate nutrition, and during these years there was a particular focus on teeth. Poor teeth evidenced a poor diet, as the professor asserted in his opening speech, adding: “Anybody with eyes to see must admit to this fact” (ibid, p. 21). Better, but not good enough, healthier, but not healthy enough. As with the great exhibitions this one also had a line of vision into the future. The exhibition was a narrative about progress. One of the newspapers blazoned: “What Norway is and what it shall become”, another: “For a bigger and richer Norway!” Through the light, the glitter and the colours, the National Nutrition Exhibition spoke of growth

and development, of modernity, promising that *everything* could be much bigger and much better. “If all the industries are set in gear along with the rest of the business machinery,” the chairman of the organising committee said in his opening speech, everything could proceed at “full tilt” (ibid, p. 16).

“Only when this country has been appropriately cultivated and we grow enough food ourselves will we be able to feel that we are a genuinely free and independent nation” – another quotation from the professor’s speech which in the aftermath may remain the most captivating feature of the exhibition, in view of the times. A people who grew sufficient food for their own needs would also be a free people. This alludes to familiar metaphors. The Norwegian farmer had a strong position in the national self-concept. Even when Norway had been a part of the Kingdom of Denmark-Norway and later in the union with Sweden, the farmer was depicted as free and autonomous, and similarly a national diet based on the country’s own produce would lead to a free and autonomous nation. The idea of self-sufficiency was elevated from the local to the national sphere, from the private to the collective. The exhibition was a battle cry for mobilisation: “In the midst of these hard times where we in Europe feel the threat of war hanging over us, it is natural that each and every country should review their own national household” (ibid, p. 3), which made nutrition an issue of national defence. This was mobilisation to the core: “Being self-sufficient with food is half the battle”. As wars bring together and unite a people, the National Nutrition Exhibition sought to bring together and unite, both politically and culturally, by constructing a new collective identity, establishing divisions between those who were inside and those who were outside, “us” and “them”, in this case Norway and Europe.

Some Notes on Norwegian Modernity in the 1930s

Norwegian historians have described the 1930s as a period of paradoxes. On the one hand much was new in this period of pervasive optimism, but the decade also had its share of crises. It was a “time of contradictions”, says historian Anne Lise Seip, who has studied welfare questions and the development of the Norwegian welfare state. She points out how this was the decade of modernism, functionalist architecture, health, vitamins and modern kitchens, but also the decade of mass unemployment, overcrowded housing, outdoor water taps and outdoor toilets. It was the decade when 300,000 Norwegians subsisted on poor relief, and the contrast between the grim poverty and the light, modern lifestyle was vast. This was the “last ice age” of poor relief (Seip, 1989, p. 219). The contrasts emerged in particular in the issues dividing town and country, centre and periphery. While Oslo citizens saw growth and development, and, if we focus on nutrition, were able to offer schoolchildren a proper, rational and optimum breakfast each day before school started, the so-called Oslo breakfast, a number of municipal authorities were placed

under direct administration. The welfare offices were forced to distribute food instead of money.⁵ Here the problem was not deciding what the optimum should be, as the Oslo breakfast exemplified, but rather giving as little as possible. The number of calories per portion doled out was so low that a group of young Socialist doctors in 1935 publicly doubted whether the poor received an adequate amount of food. “We are shamefully starving those on poor relief. Forced to eat salted ham and salted herring all year round” one of the major papers in the country announced after they had shown the outcome of their analyses to their colleagues in *Det Norske Medicinske Selskab* (The Norwegian Medical Association) (*Dagbladet* (Liberal newspaper), 26 April 1935).

This awoke great concern, never before had there been such a heated debate in the history of the Association, in the words of one who was present (Strom, 1980, p. 145). It was a battle between “the gladiators” is the verdict of the historians (Nordby, 1989; Haave, 1990), who saw the battle as a conflict between young Socialist doctors and the conservative physiologists. Disagreement was violent and debates were rife. The initiative was followed by three new meetings and newspaper discussions. The nutrition issue was obviously controversial and in the esoteric circles of the Medical Association there were numerous discussions, particularly when it came to the question of standards. How would they be measured? Through nutrition lists, statistics or clinically? Most favoured a combination of these, but clinical examinations were a strong preference in a period when doctors were reinforcing their professional position in public. The discussions, disagreements, the uproar in the medical association generally involved this issue.

In the 1920s vitamin research had made great progress. Ever more vitamins were “discovered” and their chemical composition was established. This created the basis for far-reaching industrial activities which Norwegian research environments also participated in. Vitamin research was one of the few areas in which Norway managed to produce research of international stature during the inter-war years (Amdam & Songer, 1994, p. 70; Songer, 1997). Norwegian researchers made their names known internationally with Axel Holst, one of the pioneers in vitamin research, leading the way, and researchers from abroad came to Norway. In 1920, for example, Fredric Growland Hopkins and Jack Cecil Drummond, both recognised names in the history of vitamin research, contacted the Norwegian company Nycomed & Co with a view to collaboration. With increased knowledge, there also arose some uncertainty, which is one of the many paradoxes concerning vitamins. It turned out that the vitamin content of foodstuffs depended on a number of factors, including production conditions, methods of storage and preparation and conservation techniques. Additionally, vitamins depended on nature itself and its seasonal changes. The long and dark Norwegian winter proved to be a “vitamin-critical” period for man and animal. The poor and marginal agricultural country far to the north which had grown big and strong now became a vitamin-poor country. Some

of the many new slogans resulting from this went like: “Remember vitamins during the food shortage period in the spring”, “Give your children fresh fruit and uncooked roots during the six months of winter” and “Sunshine in Milk”, a milk advertising headline urging that more milk be drunk.⁶

A traditional aspect of Norwegian agriculture has been that farmers, who for the most part have been peasants, combined their farm work with other industries. Thus they had a double economy and a large degree of self-sufficiency, such as farming combined with fisheries in coastal parts of the country, and farming combined with forestry in the expansive eastern regions. During the electrification of the country, districts which had poor soil but were rich in natural resources, such as waterfalls, would develop industries. Hence it was not uncommon to see a farmer operating a small farm and working in industry. The farm ensured stability and provided the staples, while the sea, forest or factory would provide the necessary cash. In such households the man would be away for large parts of the day or year with the actual farmer in many cases being a woman. A commonly used metaphor about this arrangement is the farm as the “mother” of the sea, the forest or the factory. There is an archaic tone to this: While the man is out hunting, the woman stays at home, cultivating the soil and preparing food.

**TO VIEW THIS FIGURE PLEASE REFER TO THE
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Figure 8.3 This was the way that the Norwegian folk would be guaranteed a sound and proper diet. There are no cooked dishes here, but rather raw produce, so there was no room for doubt as to what type of food the new diet should consist of.

Photo: Hedemarks musaet og domkirkeudden.

The National Nutrition Exhibition

The emergence of a new national diet has a clear link to Norwegian agriculture which in the 1930s went through major changes. Farming was increasingly aimed at a market. This was particularly obvious for milk-producing farms, which evolved into a special industry across the country. Instead of processing milk into cheese and butter at each farm, milk was increasingly sent to dairies, where whence more than half of it was sold as a ready-to-drink consumer product (Furre, 1971). This restructuring led to overproduction. What was to be done with all the milk? The modernisation of farming and particularly the increase in milk production were important factors in the message about the new diet, ensuring that fresh milk became one of the most important foodstuffs. Milk includes all the nutrients bodies need, and was one of the most versatile of all foods. “One litre of milk per person per day” was the recommended amount, over half of it to be drunk. Pure, fresh, white milk in glasses or bottles may be taken as the very symbol of the new national diet. In this glass of milk the ideas of agricultural policy and new scientific knowledge were united.

Politically, the 1930s represent an important period in recent Norwegian history. In 1935 *Det Norske Arbeiderpartiet* (the Norwegian Labour Party) came into power, introducing a period with a high degree of political stability. At this time the party had discarded its revolutionary slogans, becoming more and more a democratic reform party with a planned central economy as an important economic tool. During this process Norway would also be united, which was expressed by the new party slogan “town and country hand in hand”. The nutrition exhibition was directly linked to this. Not only was the first event arranged in the Oslo City Hall, it was also the first time that the Labour Party collaborated with the agricultural organisations (Haave, 1990). Workers and farmers collaborated in this exhibition, not only in the executive committee, but also as the target group. “The exhibition has something to tell us all” was the slogan when the exhibition was set up in the little forestry and agricultural municipality Elverum in the eastern part of the country.

Many and partly conflicting interests met in the message of the new national diet, not only ideologically with representatives of most political hues from the far left to the far right of the political landscape. This message made social policy into agricultural policy and agricultural policy into social policy. It was, moreover, a question of demographics and regional policy, topics which have held strong positions in Norwegian social life and culture. The 1930s were also the years which saw the establishment of a Norwegian nutrition policy, which says something about the political will that existed in favour of nutrition issues during these years (Haave, 1990). Much has been written about this by Norwegian historians in terms of agricultural policy, social policy, the development of the welfare state and scientific hygiene as well. Some have studied these issues from a nutritional perspective, and others have written about central actors. Few, however, have considered these fields in relation to each other, and nobody has done so from the perspective of

everyday culture. Agricultural policy is agricultural history, social policy is social history and the development of nutrition science is history of science, all separated and distinct from social and cultural matters. This is not a particularly Norwegian phenomenon.

Very little work has hitherto been done within the history of nutrition which firmly links the scientific domain with the social, which looks at the relations between the production of scientific knowledge about nutrition and the social and political valuations that have entered into the promotion and application of such knowledge (Kammaing & Cunningham, 1996, p. 1).

This quotation is taken from *The Culture and Science of Nutrition, 1840–1940*, where Harmke Kamminga and Andrew Cunningham point out that this applies to the influence of nutrition science on “popular culture” and the “reciprocal interaction” between the various fields. This takes us back to our point of departure, the National Nutrition Exhibition. In many ways it was with the knowledge of vitamins that the new diet started, but as time passed, the vitamins eventually became invisible, implicit, more than explicit, more a part of nature than of culture. Even though vitamins were important, even essential, from the perspective of doctors and official propaganda, they were not to be considered as vitamins, but rather as food and as a properly balanced diet. In other introductions to the subject, magazines and popular science writing, the vitamins were written in capital letters and were “these wonderful substances”.

Vitamins – “these wonderful substances”

“The science of nutrition has made impressive progress in recent years”, and the “discovery of vitamins” was its greatest conquest. So claimed a small pamphlet published by the League of Nations translated into Norwegian in 1937.⁷ In a cultural context, the qualitative aspect of nutrition issues which became so important in the disputes on nutrition and health issues in the 1930s was primarily associated with the vitamin issue. During the inter-war years this knowledge not only appeared as new, it was even claimed that vitamins were the most important medical discovery ever in the history of medicine. The most prominent representative of this view was Carl Schiøtz (1877–1938), the man behind the Oslo breakfast, and from 1932 also the professor of hygiene at the University of Oslo, and indeed the foremost spokesman on nutrition hygiene in Norway. But in what sense was this knowledge new, and how was it expressed in a Norwegian cultural context? I will now look at these questions more closely.

It had long been a well-known fact that diseases such as beriberi, scurvy and rickets were related to nutrition. It was also known that certain foods could be so

important that they meant a difference between life or death. However, what exactly this meant – the causal relation – continued to be unclear. Presentations of vitamins usually opened with some reflections on this ambiguity. “It appears virtually incredible that substances which play a significant role in nutrition may have escaped detection until ten years ago” (National Health Insurance Medicinal Research Committee, 1919). So opens an official report on vitamins published in 1919, translated into Norwegian and published in 1923.⁸ Explanations expressed how vitamins are always present in “natural foods”, those “instinctively eaten by man and animals”. These presentations generally added that it was civilisation, urbanisation and industrialisation of foodstuffs which had made knowledge about vitamins necessary.

However, it was not nutrition-related diseases that came into focus when these “long unknown substances” became known as vitamins. In a way these diseases were already under “control” and were prevalent only in special situations and in particular environments, for example on long sea voyages, among poor people or because of ignorance. Nor did health activities in order to cure diseases receive the greatest attention, since the shift to vitamins focused on preventive health care, in a completely new way. The new discourse ensured that nutritional issues, previously only *one* of many issues, were promoted to the most important issue. Needless to say, vitamins were not the *only* factor; the scientific hygiene of the late nineteenth century, with its emphasis on cleanliness, had in many ways succeeded as a project, it was just a matter of following in the same tracks. Then the “shock” came as the pamphlet issued by the League of Nations put it, and this is where vitamins and nutritional issues became important. “Innumerable studies have scientifically proved that the general poor state of health is mainly caused by inappropriate nutrition” (P.M., 1937, p. 7). Diet and the question of nutrition became the focal point of scientific hygiene. While bacteria were called the invisible “enemies”, vitamins were the invisible “friends”, and friends and enemies are, needless to say, not compatible. We fight our enemies, and we build protection and fortification against them, while we seek out our friends; good friends even reach out a helping hand. Vitamins were the good friends reaching out a hand, saying: “If you wish to be healthy let me show you the way.”

Not only could vitamins cure diseases, but perhaps more importantly, these hitherto unknown substances could prevent diseases from occurring. Even more fantastically, they were able to build up sound health right from the mother’s womb no less, and even before that. Sometimes, wrote two Norwegian doctors, the consequences of inadequate nutrition do not appear immediately; they may require a long time for their gestation. The effects might in certain cases only emerge distinctly in the next generation (Evang & Hansen, 1937, p. 166). Diseases were divided into two categories; those which were *manifest*, as for example the various nutrition-related deficiency diseases (avitaminoses), and those which were *latent*,

diseases which had not yet emerged. The latter received the greatest attention. “The richest field for future medical research is the wide area between health and avitaminosis” (Graupner, 1941, p. 127). Between health and sickness, between life and death, according to this scale only the best is good enough.

As with the Stockholm exhibition, the vitamins also had “a line of vision into the future”, as with them *everything* could become much bigger and much better. Vitamins directed attention to what was optimal, ideal and perfect. “Hardly any sick condition exists which cannot be alleviated with their assistance”, to cite one of the many popular texts (Graupner, 1941, p. 21). Not only sickness, but also *weakness* could be prevented “to a degree not yet perceived by most”, as Schiøtz put it in 1926.⁹ “The progress made by science and hygiene during the latter half of the nineteenth century has led both the public at large and the state authorities to come to recognise the possibilities for improvement (my underlining) which are within the grasp of mankind”, to quote from the League of Nations’ little pamphlet on nutrition (P. M., 1937, p. 20). For preventive health vitamins meant great possibilities, inspiring hopes for an even better future.

As the modernity of the 1930s is a narrative of growth and development, so are vitamins. Their narrative is of something new, shining and fresh, and just as Oslo City Hall was new, and national nutrition was new, vitamins also appeared as something new. If the knowledge of nutrition in the nineteenth century was a *new* knowledge of nutrition, the knowledge of the twentieth was even *newer*. Vitamins constituted a newer knowledge of nutrition, to quote the American scientist Elmer McCollum (McCollum & Simmons, 1929). The modernism of the 1930s was a return to the idea of the simple and natural, and vitamins were part of this. They would, said Schiøtz, “teach mankind to return to natural nutrition” (Schiøtz, 1926, p. 27). Back to nature, back to simple and original things, to simple procedures, to healthy and natural food, back to everything which man and animal eat instinctively, back to fresh white milk, to the child and to the hope of a new and better future.

Vitamins in this period were portrayed as the very elixir of nutrition, even being compared to the life elixirs that mankind had been looking for down through the ages. This characterisation is from the book entitled *Elixir des Lebens: Von Hormonen und Vitaminen* which was published by a reputable Norwegian publishing house in 1941. Directly translated, the Norwegian title was: *The Adventure of Vitamins and Hormones* (Graupner, 1941).¹⁰ As the little boy who had ventured into the blue mountain, vitamins also opened up a new and promising land. The history of vitamins here is a story of discovery, about how science with its “exact methods”, the “incredibly accurate measuring tools” and the “marvellous efforts by intelligence and labour” had turned the dream into reality. Modern research had created a new theory of life elixirs.

The National Nutrition Exhibition

It is not the phantasmagoric life elixir of alchemists, which would give man eternal youth, but substances which will serve public health, and life in its continual rejuvenation with generation following generation. Once and for all these substances have now conquered their rightful place in the world (ibid, p. 206).

Together with a tribute to modern science and progress, there was also another story, a story shrouded in mystery and magic. Hardly any other branch of science could “spellbind its adherents” as vitamins could, it was claimed in *The Adventure of Vitamins* (ibid, p. 12). Even the name offered associations with enigmatic and unresolved matters.

The history of the name is long and complicated. Casimir Funk, who invented the term in 1912, is not a great man in the annals of vitamin research – if he is mentioned at all, it is in a fairly derogatory manner.¹¹ The name of the new wonder was problematic and came under much discussion. In 1921, for example, a Norwegian vitamin researcher wrote; “the word vitamin is now unconsciously associated with the perception of something mystical, in a chemical sense unresolved” (Poulssoon, 1923, p. 16). Poulssoon was only waiting for the day when vitamins would be given more direct chemical names. Only then, he believed, would vitamins be pulled out from under their veil. But in spite of much resistance, the name had come to stay. It had actually staked “its claim in the civilised world”, to quote a passage from *The Adventure of Vitamins*. Along with this name, vitamins also retained some of their enigmatic nature. Vitamins, these “most wonderful substances”, which could instantly make a person who was virtually dead well again, could make an almost blind person see again, and give a weak person renewed vitality, resembled a magic incantation, a miracle, full of healing, and food rich in vitamins was even called *miracle food*.

By focusing on how the knowledge of vitamins was transformed in Norwegian culture, we can see that vitamins not only referred to one rationality, but to many. The story of vitamins is a narrative which embraces partly contradictory rationalities. It is a narrative of science and progress, of adventure and reality, but also of magic and enigmas, and all of this at the same time. “In a study of (. . .) vitamins past and the present, modern scientific ideas and medieval pondering on magic potions and life elixirs meet in a peculiar way,” says *The Adventure of Vitamins* (Graupner, 1941, p. 12). However, the complexity, the tension, between these narratives ensured that new ideas were established and new cultural identities created.

Who Were the Recipients?

What about the recipients? Who were they and how did they receive the message of the new diet, the wonder of vitamins, the magic substances and the great opportunities? In the pictures in the little pamphlet we can see people walking

around looking at the exhibition. There are representatives from parliament and the government, but also throngs of men and women, and a number of children who were sent to the exhibition from school, indeed there were special programmes for school classes each day. It is difficult to say with any degree of certainty what kinds of people made up the audience, but references to *everybody* either in the exhibition itself or in popular writing gives one reason for claiming that familiarity with the new diet and with the word vitamin was general. However, it is hard to say what impact this may have had on action. The British historian Sally Harrocks touches on the same issue when she writes: "It is impossible to assess with any certainty the extent to which the public understood and acted upon the advice offered to them" (Kamminga & Cunningham, 1995, p. 226). Harrocks refers to a study from 1938 which shows that only a small proportion of British women were interested in nutritional issues. Nevertheless, she claims that there is evidence which points to the fact that vitamins did bring about a profound change in the way many people began to view food. This has also been the perspective for this chapter. Focusing on the message, to whom it was addressed and not least to what the message referred, it is possible to get closer to the recipients and their part of the communication model, not in a real sense, but as intended recipients.

The message of the new nutrition as to the wonder of vitamins and the great opportunities they offered was clearly addressed to women, which is not particularly odd or particularly new. Responsibility for food and daily household chores has been a relatively permanent fixture of the gendered division of labour. The nutrition issue in the nineteenth century had also clearly addressed women, but at that time the financial aspect had been predominant. The nineteenth century nutrition ethic prescribed as much as possible for as little as possible; in the twentieth century food needed to be properly balanced to include vitamins. "Many types of requirement have arisen for modern housewives" a female doctor wrote in a women's magazine in 1928, adding: "Social economists have been after the household accounts for a long time, but now medical science is stepping up, wanting to take on the role of a meddling kitchen assistant" (Urd, 1928, p. 283). The housewife when "managing the larder has certain medical obligations and responsibilities, which no professional doctor, irrespective of his skills, will be able to relieve her of" (ibid). She should be able to prevent "diseases from occurring, she can cure a widespread disease". There are "diseases" (in the sense of those that exist and those which have not yet occurred) which only housewives can "cure"). With vitamins, women became the new doctors in the house, carrying a heavy responsibility on their shoulders.

Hence women were the ones who went along with the message of the magic of vitamins. This was what was claimed, and this is how it appears. Women provided each other with good advice, writing about vitamins "from woman to woman". They had no problems bringing them within the female universe. It was even

claimed that women had always known about them, “purely instinctively” – long before they came into fashion (ibid). Vitamins received so much attention that it did not take long, wrote a journalist, before “professionals went out of their way to warn against placing *too much* emphasis on these mystical substances” (Christensen, 1933, p. 268). “The power and hope of vitamins thrilled the American public, even before scientists figured out the chemical structures and physiological actions”, writes the American historian Rima Apple (1996, p. 3). It developed into “pure hysteria” was the journalist’s description, *a hysteria of vitamins*.

The characteristic “vitamin hysteria” is a good thinking tool: it focuses attention on men’s control over women and a female sphere of experience. While women praised vitamins as the “most wonderful” substances, professionals (men) warned, not against vitamins, but against placing too much emphasis on them. From the perspective of doctors, vitamins were too closely tied to “pseudo-scientific propaganda”, too much humbug. All this “advertising for vitamin pills is more or less a scam”, one of Norway’s doctors claimed. Even Carl Schiøtz, not only the foremost spokesman on nutritional hygiene, but also on vitamins, admitted that there may have been a certain “vitamin hypochondria”, which he felt had been “generated” by health sects and others. The concept of vitamins eventually became so loaded that professionals, such as professors and representatives of the official propaganda, avoided using the word, rephrasing vitamins into formulations such as “natural food”, “safe diets for Norwegian homes” or “protective foodstuffs”. The latter was the official designation developed by the hygiene committee of the League of Nations in the 1930s.

Returning to the Web of Narratives

This chapter has focused on the message of a new national nutrition as staged by the National Nutrition Exhibition in Oslo, Norway, 1936. The approach has been to look at the exhibition as a web of narratives, with threads interweaving in more or less complex patterns. Some of the stories are connected to politics and state control, as shown by the story about the sale and over-production of milk products. The Oslo breakfast or school breakfast which was introduced to the schools in Oslo and many other areas of the country in the 1930s is another easily discernible thread. This draws our attention to the role of the school in designing what was to be a new national dietary imperative, with fresh milk as the most versatile element. This meal was not primarily a school meal, since its first and foremost aim was the meal in the home, getting the Oslo breakfast to be the home’s meal, that was the goal. The organisation of this meal varied round the country. In Oslo the local authorities organised it, while in other areas voluntary organisations, such as the Red Cross, which collaborated with the teachers and the homes, organised the meal. In some parts of the country the children were encouraged to bring the

contents of an Oslo breakfast with them to school, so that they could start the day with a proper, rational and controlled meal.

As the years went by, what was perhaps the most important story in this message has become more or less invisible, becoming a part of nature more than of culture, and that is the story of vitamins. An examination of a broad sample of contemporary popular-science texts and weekly magazines, however, shows how once this knowledge was culturally created. Vitamins brought about a new diet for a new time. Just as Oslo City Hall, built in the functionalist style of the age, was new and a materialised dream of a new and better life, vitamins were also new and represented a vision of a new and better future.

Notes

1. Needless to say, the Exhibition is gone and cannot be seen. However, shortly after the Exhibition closed, a little pamphlet was published by Ekspressreklame A/S. This pamphlet features some material from the Exhibition, with a floor plan, pictures featuring showcases, some of the many posters from the Exhibition, photographs of people, small notices and comments, lectures/papers and some background information. This makes it possible to virtually carry out fieldwork on the Exhibition in this little pamphlet. (*Den Nasjonale Kostholdmessen. Planmessen* (The National Nutrition Exhibition. The Plan Exhibition) 1936, hereafter referred to as DNKM, 1936).
2. A number of speeches were given at the opening. The chairman gave a speech, acting Prime Minister Halvdan Koht gave a speech, and professor of physiology at the University of Oslo, Einar Langfeldt, also made a speech, hereafter referred to as the professor's speech at the opening.
3. In 1940 some of the many dietary studies were compiled in a book. Each of the foodstuffs were presented individually. Among the things written about milk was the following: "Currently there is an intense propaganda campaign to increase milk consumption." This propaganda was coming from two camps, doctors and those who had a direct economic interest, i.e. the dairy farmers. It also states that the consumption of milk had increased significantly in recent years, for example, the Oslo Board of Health discovered that from 1925 to 1935 daily milk consumption had increased by 130 g, from 450 g to 580 g (Rustung 1940, p. 23).
4. Foreign organisations had shown great interest in the exhibition. From Geneva and Berlin came enquiries for information about it, but the greatest interest in the exhibition, it is claimed, came from the Swedes.

5. In accordance with a proposal from a unanimous city council in 1932, it was proposed that the Oslo breakfast, which consisted of fresh milk right from the cow, bread and fruit or a vegetable, be introduced in all the schools in Oslo. Thus all children started the day with a proper, rational meal – an optimal diet in one meal. This decision, which was referred to as a nutrition reform, a complete turn around, virtually a revolution, was also introduced in other parts of the country (Lyngø, 1998).
6. Quotations are taken from the magazine *Liv og Sundhet* (Life and Health) 1934–1938, which hereafter will be referred to as L&S.
7. The League of Nations. The hygiene committee’s pamphlet, published with funds from a legacy for promoting public health in 1937. Original title not found, hereafter the pamphlet is referred to as P.M., 1937.
8. It was published in 1919 under the name “Accessory food factors” with vitamins in parenthesis. When the report was translated into Norwegian in 1923, “the vitamins” was simply “vitamins”.
9. He said this in a number of contexts, in weekly magazines, interviews in newspapers, and in lectures to his colleagues.
10. This book will here be referred to simply as *The Adventure of Vitamins*.
11. “Funk coined the name “vitamine” and this, with its original final *e* discarded in deference to certain accepted rules of chemical nomenclature, has now been universally adopted”, Drummond wrote in 1939 in the classic *The Englishman’s Food. Five Centuries of English Diet* p. 424. This ‘final *e*’ later became a problem, and at a biochemists’ meeting in 1920 Drummond proposed removing the *e*, and the various vitamins were distributed according to the letters of the alphabet A, B, C and eventually also into sub-groups.

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Wine, Champagne and the Making of French Identity in the Belle Epoque

Kolleen M. Guy

War had begun. Or so the French public learned as they opened the pages of *Le Figaro* one morning in 1908. International relations were tense: the antagonism between France and Germany was acute; and, of course, in the volatile Balkan region nationalist tempers seemed poised to explode. French readers were undoubtedly shocked to learn that this clash was, in fact, domestic. This was a civil war. This conflict, the reader was gravely informed, was splintering the very foundations of the French nation. Civil war, they learned, would undermine the most sacred of all French traditions. Liberty? Equality? Fraternity? No. Ingestion. Eating and drinking. In a country that had no ordinary relationship with food and drink, this civil war – the “Guerre des Deux Haricots” or the “War of the Two Beans” – was a national calamity.¹

According to *Le Figaro*, hostilities began in the provinces of France, satirically dubbed the Kingdom of Little Peas. Two Beans, each originating from a different region, confronted each other at the market. One Bean argued that he was the superior vegetable, representative of the refined riches of the Kingdom, endowed with “unique qualities” and heir to a rich historical legacy. His opposing legume, in the outlandish dialogue that followed, blasted these assertions by laying claim to very similar “unique qualities”.

Mounting anger turned the Beans an unnatural shade of green. On the verge of violence, the seething Beans called out to the Peas, who legislated for the Kingdom from their seats in the National Pod. Each Bean demanded special status within the Kingdom derived from his intrinsic superiority. The Peas, for their part, found themselves sharply divided over the claims of the recalcitrant Beans. Incensed by the other’s rival claims and frustrated by the inaction of the Peas, the two Beans savagely attacked each other.

Fighting quickly spread. The noisy battle between the two Beans attracted the attention of other members of the Kingdom of the Little Peas. A truffle from Périgueux, a stick of butter from Isigny, an asparagus stalk from Argenteuil, and a wedge of cheese from Brie vaulted into the raging conflict. Amidst the cacophony of competing claims, other vegetables, cheeses, and wines joined in demanding

special legislation to acknowledge their distinctive qualities. War escalated. As they oozed and bruised, splattered and spewed, each belligerent clamoured louder for state intervention on their behalf. The Peas, paralysed in their Pod, watched with horror as the “The War of the Two Beans” tragically engulfed the Kingdom.²

“The War of the Two Beans” would have made a wonderful folk tale explaining the origins of a particularly rich, delectable French dish. But the editors of *Le Figaro* had less light-hearted goals behind publishing the “war coverage”. The grotesque “war story” was a scathing critique of the mounting demands emanating from the provinces of France for legal protection of agricultural products at the beginning of the twentieth century. Led by French fine wine producers, regional agricultural interests demanded a system of *appellations d’origine* – state-sanctioned controls of the use of names that evoked a geographic place of origin. This protectionist system of designating and controlling geographically based names for wines, spirits, and other foodstuffs became the prototype for the *appellation d’origine contrôlée* (AOC) laws of the 1930s and the model for late twentieth-century European Union legislation. Debates over the parameters of the legislation and its potential international implications were closely followed throughout the wine-drinking world. The final outcome of the “War of Two Beans” had both widespread and long-term implications.

Producers of fine wines – champagne, cognac, Bordeaux – ridiculed as the beans who launched the war, argued that their reputations and their national heritage were being usurped by those who treated local product appellations as generic labels. Under pressure from the provinces, a series of bills were introduced in the National Assembly between 1905 and 1908 to protect regional appellations by ending adulteration and fraud within the wine industry. This legislation unleashed an intense debate that extended beyond wine production to include other foodstuffs linked to a delimited geographic area, what later became known as *terroir*.³ This ruralist and protectionist discourse elevated the land and its products to a “central part of every Frenchman’s legacy”.⁴ Indeed, historian Pierre Nora notes in the introduction to the monumental study of French memory, that “the ‘land’ [in France] would not exist as such without the ruralist and protectionist movement” of this period.⁵ Throughout the Belle Époque, contention over controlling the land and its legacy through geographically based names seemed poised to degenerate into the “War of Two Beans”. In this way, the satirical food fight presented in *Le Figaro* seemed at least as much prophecy as parody.

The nationalist character of debates over protectionist legislation, such as the one lampooned in *Le Figaro*, is generally misunderstood by historians.⁶ Western business and industry have, after all, wrapped themselves in various national flags to further their interests at least since the era of Adam Smith. Rarely do historians look at how debates over the protection of commodities, such as wine, shaped and were shaped by notions of identity, linking the fate of a material good to that of

the nation. Wine in particular, as a product associated with France, took on an authority and legitimacy not afforded most commodities. This extraordinary relationship has not gone unnoticed by scholars. Historians, particularly practitioners of the *Annales* school, have focused on wine as an element of diet, examining drinking patterns over the centuries.⁷ While this research tells us much about the cultural landscape of viticulture, we still understand relatively little about how wine's symbolic power was invoked at the local and national levels as part of a construction of "Frenchness" during a crucial period for the emergence of a mass, consumer culture and the creation of national consciousness.⁸

As the story of the "War of Two Beans" suggests, the conflict over the protectionist laws for *appellations d'origine* for French wine was based not on specific economic logic but on claims of authenticity, history and patrimony. The case of French wine legislation illustrates the extent to which protectionist legislation was part of a larger discussion about the cultural identity of "an essential, a true France".⁹ This essential France, as the debate over protection of wines illustrates, was highly contested. Historians have noted that by 1900 there was a new emphasis on culture as a central component of French identity and new state-centred policies directed at integrating "the disparate regions of provincial France into a common political culture".¹⁰ Legislation that protected regional appellations was one such attempt to reconcile the *petite patrie* of village and region with the *grande patrie*. Laws for *appellations d'origine* recognised regional wines as goods essential to the nation of France, making them a part of a uniquely French legacy.¹¹ Through a process of confrontation and compromise, the wines of France would become, in the words of Raymond Poincaré, "the national fortune".¹²

Appellations d'Origine

Names of French villages, provinces, or *pays* were frequently used in France to designate agricultural products considered local specialities. By the end of the nineteenth century, improvements in transport, new processing techniques, and reduced production costs made it possible to market these formerly local specialities to an ever broader group of consumers at home and abroad. Some of these products – such as roquefort, champagne, cognac, and brie¹³ – developed reputations for excellence that extended far beyond their immediate production area. Taste professionals touted these products as essential to the art of eating and drinking.¹⁴ Menus at restaurants, from the Grand Hôtel of Monte Carlo to the Ritz in London and the Petit Moulin in Paris, prominently featured regional agricultural specialities.¹⁵ Previously local specialities had become a part of the culture of ingestion by the turn of the century.

As these agricultural products moved into the mass, consumer culture of the period, however, they risked losing their association with their local place of origin.

The name of the village or province could become, in the eyes of consumers, little more than a generic label specifying a type of food or drink. No longer rooted in the locale, the name could be used to denote a product category.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, this shift had a significant effect on the levels of profits earned by local producers who formerly had control over supply. It was largely recognised by this period that the word *gruyère*, for example, had become a generic label for a type of cheese. Hard, yellow, whole-milk cheeses used in cooking or served with ordinary meals were widely designated as “*gruyère*”. Earlier in the century, this was not the case. *gruyère* was coveted as a distinctive sweet, nutty-flavoured cheese originating in the *Gruyère* district of Switzerland. Increased distribution of hard, yellow cheeses of varying qualities all bearing the name of *gruyère* undermined the monopoly on production once enjoyed by Swiss producers.¹⁷ While this shift was imperceptible to the mass of consumers, *Gruyère*’s descent from high value, specialty product to generic appellation did not go unnoticed by those with a stake in selling France’s regional specialities.

No agricultural sector reacted more swiftly or more forcefully to this cautionary tale than fine wine producers, particularly those in Champagne. Consumers had come to identify sparkling wine with a particular region in France thanks in large measure to the efforts of *Syndicat du Commerce des Vins de Champagne* (hereafter *Syndicat du Commerce*). Founded in 1882 by some of the largest exporters of French sparkling wine, the *Syndicat du Commerce* used their considerable financial resources to promote and protect the association of *vins mousseux*, champagne, and France.¹⁸ “The wine of Champagne has suffered the fate of all great discoveries,” wrote one *négociant* at mid-century, “a multitude of imitations rushed forward, and the leprosy of counterfeits clung to its vogue.”¹⁹ The *Syndicat du Commerce* engaged in a legal and legislative battle to protect the regional appellation from being used as a generic label for sparkling wines and brand-names from imitation or counterfeit production. The appellation “*champagne*” was not protected by law, and wines originating outside of the region frequently used the name. Calling their production “*champagne*”, competitors often adopted the style of champagne labels and packaging.²⁰ “*Champagne*”, the syndicate argued in legal action, was to be used by the community of producers within the confines of *Marne*.²¹

By the turn of the century, there was a general alarm at the increasing reports that regional wine names were being used as generic labels.²² From his position as chef at the Ritz, the famous French chef Auguste Escoffier issued a protest in 1906 “against the new practice of selling, under the name of *vin français*, products that are not from our *terroir*”.²³ The *Syndicat du Commerce* in the *Marne* joined with other large wine exporters and regional merchants or *négociants* to denounce the use of French regional labels for wines produced abroad. Their lobbying efforts mainly focused on creating an international body of law that would recognise the regional appellations for wines as “industrial property” belonging to the manufacturer

or bottler of the finished product.²⁴ From the perspective of the *négociants*, fraud was primarily the result of usurping of regional names by manufacturers or bottlers outside of France.

Peasant growers or *vignerons* focused their attention on stopping the substitution of “fraudulent” wines for those which were well known. The commercial success of a region could be exploited by “unscrupulous” growers or merchants, they would argue, who would blend regional wines with less distinguished wines originating from any number of different places. Peasant grape growers presented themselves as protectors of the integrity of French wine, guardians of quality. Growers from the Loire region, for example, in a conflict over the name “champagne” accused “a rather large number of merchants from the Marne” with being the “the first to include in their *cuvées* wines that were purchased in diverse *pays*” and even in the Loire region itself.²⁵ Growers in the Marne, for their part, expressed their outrage over a much publicised and extremely damaging article from the Laboratoire Municipale of Paris, which reported large amounts of falsifications among the finest wines entering Paris.²⁶ Indeed, the idea that fraud was committed by French wine producers became so commonplace by the end of the nineteenth century that even in such places as the *Dictionnaire populaire de médecine* it was stated that most fine champagne was falsified.²⁷ Petitions from *vignerons* reveal a general concern with fraudulent production not abroad but within France.²⁸

Peasants and merchants lobbied the national government. Their letters and petitions attempted to link the fate of French regional specialities, particularly luxury wines, with that of the nation.²⁹ Pamphlets, letters to the editor, and press releases directed at a larger public audience stressed the ways in which wines were “rooted” in the very soil of France.³⁰ By the early twentieth century, the land in France had an unshakable popular reputation, affirmed by writers, historians, and gastronomes for being uniquely rich, fertile, and productive. As one famous gastronome noted, “French soil enjoys the privilege of producing naturally and in abundance the best vegetables, the best fruits, the best wines in the world.”³¹ Wines, just like the privileged land of the French, were presented in lobbying efforts as the common property of the nation. The industry’s ability to successfully mask what were essentially local interests as national concerns convinced government officials of the need to protect fine wines as a national patrimony.

Protecting the national patrimony, however, was not a simple matter. In August 1905 the French government passed a general law to counter the fraudulent production of agricultural products. This was, however, a consumer protection law designed to give the consumer redress if wines and other food products were misrepresented by the seller. The law was meant to counter a range of fraudulent practices from “stretching” wines by adding water to claiming that red wines from Algeria were Bordeaux. Supplementary measures were passed in 1907 to stem a host of other fraudulent practices in winemaking. Legislation linked wine to the

soil as a “natural” product.³² Linking wine and soil thus seemingly protected local appellations. There was no attempt, however, to establish geographic boundaries of production, which would link a specific wine with a specific soil. Geographic boundaries – clearly delimiting the link between soil and wine – required delimiting the French men and women who could rightfully act as intermediaries between the two through the cultivation and manipulation of grapes to arrive at the finished product.³³

Boundaries were critical for wine. It may seem self-evident that wines from Algeria were not from the Bordeaux region of France. Labelling Algerian wine as “Bordeaux” would, thus, mislead the consumer. But what about the vineyards outside of the key villages or core production centres? The town of Blaye just opposite Margaux is one example. Historically it produced white wines for distillation in cognac, but it also produced robust red wines that were periodically marketed as Bordeaux. While the classifications from 1855 did not include these growths, it did not exclude them from benefiting from the more general appellation of Bordeaux. In this case, fixing the Gironde river as a boundary would cause considerable social disruption for the wine communities outside of the boundary of demarcation. The problem was more acute for complex blended wines such as champagne. Champagne was made from wines from several years and many vineyards. What was to be the final boundaries of the vineyards when the final product bore only a general place name? And what about manufacturing wines outside the wine region? Could wine produced in Germany with grapes purchased exclusively in the primary vineyards near Reims, for example, be legally labelled “champagne”? There were, indeed, a number of German firms who made regular purchases of French grapes for sparkling wine. And there were even a number of French firms that had production facilities in Germany in order to avoid losses of bottled wine in transit.³⁴ The more expensive and exclusive the wine, the higher the stakes were in delimiting boundaries.

Within months of passage of the Law of 1905, it was the champagne industry that took the lead in lobbying the government for “complementary measures” to demarcate wine regions. It was the effort at delimitation that brought the relationship between the French people and their soil into the centre of the discussion. *Appellations d’origine* was based on the principle that finite geographical boundaries existed beyond which wines and those who produced them were no longer entitled to use a regional appellation. Geographic delimitations were used to legitimate and limit access to the national patrimony. Different groups within Champagne sought to promote their positions, their concerns, as those of the nation, demanding a national response. State efforts to appease the various “protectors” of the patrimony by delimiting the “champagne” region launched the “War of Two Beans.”

The Origins of the War

Readers of *Le Figaro* in 1908 had little difficulty identifying the two recalcitrant beans in the satirical war. The wine-producing community of the Marne and the smaller but equally vocal vine growers of the Aube were the two beans poised for battle. After receiving hundreds of petitions from angry peasant vine cultivators in both departments, the Minister of Agriculture was charged with the establishment of a Commission to examine the possibility of delimiting the vineyards. A public hearing on the issue was held in May 1908. Hearings were to determine and demarcate the boundaries of champagne based on local use of the term, historic production techniques, and natural factors like soil and climate. The actual meeting, however, turned into a battle over the construction of the French past.³⁵

The public gathering was as tumultuous – although not as messy – as the *Figaro* satire suggests. Official representatives of the peasant vine cultivators and merchant-manufacturers of the Marne outnumbered representatives from the Aube, the Haute-Marne, and the Aisne. Supporters, particularly from the Marne, packed the hearing room despite the protests from the delegates from the other three departments.³⁶ Marne representatives arrived with clear objectives: they wanted legally recognised boundaries that corresponded to a limited area of grape cultivation all of which fell within the department of the Marne. Other areas of vine cultivation – and the peasant cultivators of this area – were to be excluded. Grapes grown outside a carefully defined area would not be Champagne grapes and, thus, could not be used for the production of sparkling wines bearing the regional appellation. Aube representatives, in particular, were there, seething with anger over the exclusion of their grapes.³⁷

The transcripts from the public hearing reveal how each of the “Beans” attempted to demonstrate their superiority by claiming to be the heir to a rich historical legacy. Speaking for Aube wine producers, Député Thierry Delanoue opened the hearings by challenging the historic construction of “champagne.” The city of Troyes, he began, was the historic centre of champagne. Holding the meeting in Châlons-sur-Marne, he argued, was a move to promote the interest of a few producers who wanted to disfigure the limits of champagne by creating a “Champagne without a capital, completely deformed, where it is necessary to abolish all the old memories that hold together the territory”. Perhaps more damning, he argued that the new, modern champagne in a delimited territory would create a commodity-based boundary that would be detached to one that belonged to the people, *les Champenois*. With this, he produced a series of petitions and protests signed by *les Champenois* from his department.³⁸

Delanoue went further to question the “paternity” of champagne by proclaiming the town of Clairvaux, within the confines of Aube, as the “birth place” of champagne.

Dom Pérignon was not the legitimate “father” of champagne. Monks from a monastery in the Aube, he claimed, were the first to cultivate the grape varietal known as “d’Arbanne.” Wines from these grape varietals were later used at the abbey of Dom Pérignon in Hautvillers in the Marne to produce sparkling wine. Champagne was, indeed, invented by a monk. There were, however, many true fathers of champagne. The Aube could rightfully claim status as the birthplace of champagne and the legitimate inheritor of the father’s legacy. No descendent of this heritage could claim, he argued, to be more *champenois* than anyone else.³⁹

Questioning their legitimacy as heirs to Pérignon was almost too much for the citizens of the Marne. Transcripts note the tense tone of the Marne representatives in the aftermath of Delanoue’s remarks. Marne growers turned to their representatives to launch a counter attack. The facts regarding the origins of sparkling wine were well established and well known, Marne representatives argued in quick succession. They alluded to Dom Pierre Pérignon, a saintly blind monk, who was said to have used his highly developed senses of smell and taste to develop sparkling wines at the Abbey of Hautvillers between 1668 and 1715. Pérignon was considered the “father” of champagne, the inventor of sparkling wine, and the founder of the champagne industry. As *vignerons* representative Michel-Lacacheur argued, in a rhetorical flourish, “we [growers of the Marne] remain the inheritors of not only the name champagne, but the vines that still produce the same celebrated wines”.⁴⁰ Never had the growers from the Marne strayed from their father’s legacy.⁴¹

What those speaking on behalf of the Marne failed to mention was that the popularity of the “father” story was largely the work of the professional organisation of champagne manufacturers located in Marne. Since the early 1880s, the *négociants* had worked hard to popularise the story of Pérignon. The story of Dom Pérignon’s discovery was more myth than history. A relatively obscure monk, Pérignon had been “resurrected” in the nineteenth century as part of a legendary past of the wine and the region. Over the years, champagne wine merchants had pointed to some rather dubious documents to support the Pérignon story. While these documents were no more credible than those presented by the Aube representatives, the Dom Pérignon story had seduced the drinking public. Indeed, six years later French papers would run commemorative colour-issues celebrating the bi-centennial of Pérignon’s discovery.⁴²

Not only did the Marne representatives claim to be the true heirs to the Old Regime foundations of the industry, they also claimed in the public hearings to be the valiant protectors (along with the republicans leaders of the Third Republic) of the legacy of the French Revolution. Arguing for small vineyard boundaries, representatives of Marne argued that the Revolution had justly dismantled the ancient provinces of the counts of Champagne. The feudal boundaries of the Champagne region, which had once bound the peoples of Aube and Marne, were destroyed in 1790. In the place of the oppressive, imposed boundaries of the Old

Regime, a new organic *Champagne viticole* was created based on wine-growing traditions and a productive relationship. This was the area that was, by right, the champagne region. Enlarged boundaries advocated by vine growers in the Aube, they argued, were little more than a thinly veiled attempt to re-establish feudal boundaries, recreating the feudal privilege of the nobility. The Aube, they concluded, attempted to reverse the progress of the Revolution.⁴³

The French past, and the place of the regions within that past, was constructed very differently by representatives of Aube. Countering those who advocated strict boundaries, Aube representatives argued that “champagne” was a national patrimony, a wine that linked them as a people. The proposed limited champagne region was deformed, they argued, because it was not representative of a democratic France. A new, modern “Champagne” would be exclusively based on the economic relations of a small group within the Marne. Champagne, they argued, belonged to all Frenchmen as part of their heritage. By legally demarcating boundaries, the representatives from the Aube concluded, the Third Republic would re-establish the worst of the Old Regime privileges. “The Revolution united France,” avowed one representative, “abolishing the ancient provinces; we do not want to re-establish them with their privileges, their prerogatives, their barriers; we must remain faithful to our principles of Justice and to Liberty.”⁴⁴

What is interesting for the historian in this exchange is that both sides attempt to appropriate the French Revolution. They do so, however, by revising the standard view of the impact of the French Revolution on the provinces. Alexis de Tocqueville writing in 1856 noted that there were those who viewed the Ancien Régime as the golden age of provincial liberties, which had been crudely violated by the revolution.⁴⁵ Those who believed in a pre-1789 provincial “golden age” were often discredited as separatists or monarchists by Republicans who championed a vision of France as a centralised, unitary republic.⁴⁶ Representatives of both the Marne and Aube, using the rhetoric of the Radical Republicans who dominated Third Republic France, argued that the Revolution had in fact released the provinces from revolutionary oppression. But, while the Aube representatives argued that no new regional boundaries should be established, the Marne representatives presented the vision of a new post-revolutionary, Republican France with new organic regions. The “father” of the industry might be connected to the Old Regime, but the regions themselves were at the core of a Republican France.

Tempers flared as these competing claims were set forth. Physical confrontation between the “two beans” was averted by the abrupt decision by leaders of the Aube delegation to abandon the hearings altogether. Overwhelmed by the sheer number of representatives from the Marne and contesting the legitimacy of the proceedings, members of the Aube delegation declared that there was little need to vote on the final recommendations of the Commission. As an act of protest, they left the proceedings. Less than an hour later, the Commission passed a

resolution recommending to the Minister of Agriculture that the boundaries of Champagne consisted of viticultural areas found exclusively in the Marne department with the addition of several communes from the department of the Aisne (thirteen communes in the canton of Chateau-Thierry and twenty-one communes in the canton of Condé-en-Brie).⁴⁷

Conclusions

The exchange was noisy but hardly a war. As the Minister of Agriculture reviewed the commission recommendations, however, Aube representatives and *vignerons* launched a protest (and the Marne representatives and *vignerons* a counter-protest) and other regional specialities began to demand protection. Long before the state agreed to grant Champagne (excluding the Aube) the first legally recognised regional delimitation, other fine wine producers as well as cheese producers were demanding similar proceedings.⁴⁸ Critics, such as the author of the *Figaro* piece, denounced the “carving” of France into separate, protected economic units.⁴⁹ While these claims of special status might seem petty to the critics, the conflict occasioned by recognition of one claim over another did not. Within three years of the debate over delimiting the boundaries of Champagne, armed conflict engulfed the region.⁵⁰ The satirical “War of Two Beans” seemed prophetic.

What are we to make of the appellations controversy? The discussion of regional appellations and delimitations indicates that regional identifications did not collapse in the face of market forces and national integration. Regional specialities were promoted as national goods both at home and abroad. Wines (and later other agricultural specialities) could claim a sacred place, rooted in one of the most sacred of all French possessions – the soil. Both *vignerons* and *négociants*, as the direct link to the *terroir* that produced the national beverage, could join together as protectors of the patrimony. Local communities could then link themselves to this national good and a common imagined past of France. This imagined past, in which the regions were freed from the tyranny of the Old Regime, linked the continued existence of the regions to a national narrative actively promoted by the state.

The arguments put forth during the “War of Two Beans” would be repeated by other regional communities following the example of Champagne. Through the highly publicised debates over appellations and delimitations, these regional agricultural speciality producers helped to construct a common French “memory” that gave the regions and regional agricultural products a national significance. This common memory, an essential part of nation building and forging a national consensus, was a result of sometimes fierce confrontation. Local forces and private companies were pivotal to this process, working, at times, in conjunction with the state and, as the periods of contention chronicled in this chapter highlight, at other

times, working in open opposition to the state.⁵¹ The final legal protection granted to Champagne, and later demanded by other regions, institutionalised the place of the regions and their “natural” protectors – *vignerons* and *négociants* from the luxury wine industry – within the nation. The “War of the Two Beans” assured that protection of agriculture and regional agricultural specialities was central to the French nationalist project. “The War of the Two Beans” might have been messy, but, over the long term, victory preserved a crucial place for wine in the common “memory” of France.

Notes

1. Earlier versions of this work were presented at Texas Tech University, Lubbock and the annual meeting of the Western Society for French History, Pacific Grove, CA. The author wishes to thank the panel commentators as well as William V. Bishel, Harvey Graff, Patrick Kelly and James McDonald for their helpful comments and suggestions. Special thanks to M. Louis Bergès, Director of the Archives départementales de la Marne.
2. *Le Figaro*, 5 September 1908.
3. A term with no precise equivalent in English, *terroir* is generally applied as a descriptor for the holistic combination in a vineyard environment of soil, climate, topography, and the soul of the wine producer. *Terroir*, as elaborated particularly during the 1920s, was seen as the source of distinctive wine-style characteristics. For more on *terroir*, see Wilson, 1998.
4. For an excellent discussion of the place of “the land” in French memory, see Frémont, 1997, p. 17.
5. Nora, 1997, p. xi.
6. Protectionist agricultural legislation has been approached by free trade advocates, such as the writer for *Le Figaro*, as well as late twentieth-century historians, as one factor in France’s slow or “retarded” agricultural development. Following the lead of Michel Augé-Laribé, historians conclude that peasant agriculture and small-scale production, buffered from change by state protectionist policies, were both a symptom and a source of France’s steady but slow economic growth. Protectionism, coupled with peasant mentalities and institutions, thus served as “retardative factors” in France’s economic development in the modern period (Augé-Laribé, 1912). For more contemporary discussions, see Clough, 1946; Roehl, 1976; Lévy-Leboyer, 1968. Revisionists

have chipped away at this model of economic development, arguing that the pattern of French industrialisation with its emphasis on small-scale production of luxury handicrafts and fine foods was a healthy adaptation to the competitive market. Rather than “retarditive factors” in French economic growth, small-scale farms were the strength of French industrialization. Nonetheless, they generally spend little time exploring the nationalist character of debates over protectionism (see O’Brien & Keyder, 1978; Milward & Saul, 1977. For a critique of O’Brien & Keyder see Crafts, 1984).

7. For a good overview of *Annales* historiography, see Forster & Ranum, 1979.
8. For more on this transformation, see Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992.
9. Term taken from Lebovics, 1994, p. 240.
10. Ford, 1993, p. 11. For more on the conflicts over the construction of a cultural identity in France, see Agulhon, 1982; Weber, 1976.
11. Ford (1993) demonstrates how the new Right in France at the turn of the century attempted to reconcile these two types of “patrie”.
12. Semaine Nationale du Vin, *Compte-rendu de la Semaine du Vin* (Paris: n.p., 1922), p. 378.
13. Throughout this chapter it will be necessary to distinguish between products and regions, which often have the same names. Words beginning with a lower case letter will designate products (i.e. champagne). Words beginning with an upper case letter will designate a geographic region (i.e. Champagne).
14. See, for example, the writings of French chef Auguste Escoffier (Escoffier, 1902).
15. See menus reproduced in Escoffier, 1985.
16. This can be seen most dramatically in the champagne industry. By the Belle Epoque, the name “champagne” was used to describe everything from sparkling wines of the Crimea to beer produced in Milwaukee. Indeed, the Syndicat du Commerce of Champagne took action against the Miller Brewing Company to stop its advertisements that referred to Miller as the “champagne” of bottled beers. Archives privées du Syndicat des Grandes Marques (hereafter A.P.S.G.M.) Reims, dossier 437.
17. Coquet, 1912.
18. This is, in fact, embodied in the founding statutes of the organisation. See Archives départementales de la Marne (hereafter A.D.Ma.), Châlons-sur-Marne, 197M23, Status du Syndicat du Commerce des Vins de Champagne, article 1.
19. Sutaïn, 1845, p. 145.
20. See reports in *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, October 1890; *Moniteur viticole*, September 1873; *Vigneron champenois*, 6 April 1898. See also reports in A.P.S.G.M. dossier 7, Affaire Kemp, 1909; dossier 9, Olry-Roederer, 1908; dossier 25, Cour d’Appel Paris, 1895; dossier 37, Jugement du Tribunal de

- Commerce, Werlé, 1869; dossiers 39 through 41, Saumur; dossier 42, Cidre Avenaël, 1901; dossier 57, Lorraine-Champagne.
21. See, for example, statement of syndicate in *Courier de la Champagne*, 20 April 1889.
 22. See for example, “La suppression” *Feuille viticole de la Gironde*, 7 avril 1904; “Le mot champagne” *Vigneron champenois*, 25 mai 1904.
 23. Escoffier, 1985, p. 181.
 24. Archives Nationales, Paris, Series F11 2173, Convention of Madrid; F10 2004 Règlement du commerce extérieur des produits agricoles – vins et produits vinification.
 25. Archives privées du Syndicat des Grandes Marques, Reims, dossier 38. Brief from the Cour d’Angers, 19 July 1887.
 26. Similar reports were also filed regarding the purity of many French dairy products. “Le cas de M. Girard” *Le Figaro* 20 March 1889.
 27. Labarthe, 1889.
 28. Archives Nationales, Paris, dossier F12 4853-55 Petitions agricoles; F12 6969 Fraud.
 29. Archives Nationales, Paris, dossier F12 6967-69 Fraud.
 30. Archives Nationales, F12 6873 Vin, 1860–1917; F12 4841 Conseils Généraux; F124853, F12 4854, F124898 Petitions agricole.
 31. Escoffier, 1985, p. 191.
 32. For a more detailed discussion of the importance of “naturalizing” wine-making, see Ulin, 1996.
 33. For more on the fraud legislation see Loubère, 1978; Ordish, 1972.
 34. Archives privées du Syndicat des Grandes Marque, Reims, dossier 25, Mercier.
 35. Archives départementales de la Marne, Châlons-sur-Marne, Series 155M4 Commission de Délimitation de la Champagne viticole, Séance du Mardi 12 mai 1908.
 36. A formal protest was led by the official delegations from the Aube, Haute-Marne, and the Aisne. See “Protestation contre la convocation et la composition d’une commission de délimitation de la champagne viticole” in Archives départementales de la Marne, Châlons-sur-Marne, Series 155M4 Commission de Délimitation de la Champagne viticole, Séance du Mardi 12 mai 1908.
 37. Archives départementales de la Marne, Châlons-sur-Marne, Series 155M4 Commission de Délimitation de la Champagne viticole, Séance du Mardi 12 mai 1908.
 38. Ibid.
 39. Ibid.
 40. Ibid. Excerpts from the morning session of 12 May.
 41. Ibid.
 42. For more on the Pérignon myth see, Guy, 1999, pp. 228–9.

43. Archives départementales de la Marne, Châlons-sur-Marne, Series 155M4 Commission de Délimitation de la Champagne viticole, Séance du Mardi 12 mai 1908.
44. Ibid.
45. See the discussion of Alexis de Tocqueville's work *Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (1856) in Gildea, 1994, pp. 166–70.
46. For a good introduction to regionalist views, see chapter 4 of Gildea, 1994.
47. Archives départementales de la Marne, Châlons-sur-Marne, Series 155M4 Commission de Délimitation de la Champagne viticole, Séance du Mardi 12 mai 1908.
48. See the discussion in Clementel, 1914.
49. See critiques in Archives Nationales, Paris, dossier F12 6969 Fraud.
50. For a discussion of the 1911 protests see Koukharski, 1952 and Saillet, 1969.
51. For generations of historians, rural society was determined to have eternal qualities linked to the land and its people. The task of the French nation in the late nineteenth century was to integrate the separate *pays* that made up the rural world into the nation in a process “akin to colonisation”. As this chapter suggests, in some regions, this process involved a much more active rural community who helped to shape the identity of France. For more on the standard modernisation theory of French identity, see Weber, 1976.

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Reading Food Riots: Scarcity, Abundance and National Identity

Amy Bentley

At the end of the twentieth century the world witnessed a wave of severe global crises: the collapse of economies, particularly in Asia; devastating drought, floods and fires due to El Niño weather patterns; and strict economic austerity plans forced on developing countries by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international banks. The public's frustration with high prices, deflated wages, scarce resources, shrinking food supplies, and empty bellies as a result of such phenomena led to a series of food riots in many developing countries, including Indonesia, India, Mexico and Brazil. These food riots usually consisted of looting and pillaging stores, fast food restaurants, and supply depots, blockading farm and supply trucks, or protests in town squares which erupted into mayhem and often violence. Newspaper accounts frequently mentioned that the protests and riots centred on one food item, usually a staple or key ingredient (often with a tradition of subsidisation by the government) integral to the culture's cuisine and consumed by rich and poor alike: rice, tortillas, onions, bread. The item functioned as a symbol of people's intense frustration and anger at being trapped in a global economic web in which they seem to have no agency. Government officials have been rightfully terrified of the potential for anarchy that exists if people do not get enough to eat, particularly enough of certain foods deemed essential and irreplaceable ('A Shock to the System'; 'Protesters in Mexico City Ransack a McDonalds'; Mydans, 'Price Rises Exact a High Cost in Java'; Schemo, 'In Brazil, Despair Once Again Feeds on a Drought'; Landler, 'Living for Rice, Begging for Rice'; Dugger, 'India's Hottest Political Issue: The Price of Onions'; Thompson, G., 'Tortilla Rises: Must Belts Tighten?'). While I am saddened by these occurrences, and react (though not nearly enough) by sending money to relief organisations and donating food to the needy in my own community, more often I read about these events with a sense of resignation: it seems nothing could ever stem the tide of immense need.

As a historian who studies the intersection of food and culture in the United States, however, I find food riots compelling as a focus of scholarly inquiry. Cultural historian Robert Darnton, in reference to the 1992 Los Angeles riots, posed the question: '[Can] riots be understood as something more than mindless violence?'

[Are] they saying something? [Can] they be read?' (Darnton, 1992, p. 44). Can we make sense of food riots, both those in the past and those occurring in the present, by 'reading' them like a text? Can we gain increased understanding by paying attention to the one item – the bread, meat, or rice – that is held up as a symbol? And how do the meanings of these foods change with time and across regions, cultures, and nations? What is the meaning of food disturbances set against the backdrop of American abundance, and how do these disturbances differ from those in developing nations? In short, while scholars have understood public food disturbances in a number of illuminating and important ways, including as a pre-industrial expression of collective action; as a gendered form of collective protest belying a 'female consciousness'; and as a form of nationalistic display and identity tied to the consumption of material goods, only a very few have employed a sustained, cultural exploration of the very food at the core of the disturbance (the bread, meat, rice, or milk) – the deprivation of which stirs people to the point of collective action. Such an examination can provide rich information about the connection between food and cultural/national identity.

To begin exploring these questions it is important first to examine the relationship among collective identity, food and collective protest. Food, at the base of civilisation, contains deep, multi-layered meanings. Since it is such a strong component and shaper of identity whether on the level of family, community, ethnicity, class, religion, region, or other entity, food is deeply enmeshed in a collective as well as an individual sense of identity (Narayan, 1995). Whether unprocessed or minimally processed foods (wheat, cooking oil), industrially-manufactured items (Coca-Cola or Gerber baby food), or hand-made creations (tamales, holiday cookies), people imbue particular foods with deep-seated meaning and emotion, regardless of whether they are involved in its production (farmers, processors) or merely its consumption (tea drinking in Europe or North America). How and why these foods accrue special meaning – what makes them unique to particular groups of people – can vary widely: method of preparation, long-held tradition, particular 'flavour principles,' perception of purity, religious or political significance, signification of wealth or status, or any combination of factors. The restriction in availability of these foods imbued with distinctive meaning, then, whether through government intervention or the vicissitudes of a 'free market' economy, can function as a catalyst for collective protest. This continues to prove true not only in relatively isolated communities, but in our ever-changing global villages of the twenty-first century. As the cultural geographers Bell and Valentine explain:

Other groups of people [besides tourists] in movement – migrants, refugees, guest-workers, exiles – also contribute to reshaping the global cultural (including culinary-cultural) landscape, as do other world-spanning cultural flows, including those of

Reading Food Riots: Scarcity, Abundance and National Identity

technologies, media, finance and ideologies – flows which criss-cross the globe in ‘disjunctive’ ways, creating the ‘uncertain landscapes’ or ‘imagined worlds’ symptomatic of contemporary globalisation . . . Commodities [such as food] have a powerful role in these imagined worlds: as bearers of many of the symbols of globalisation, they are routinely used to articulate both place and movement – and, through those, identity and identification (Bell & Valentine, 1997, p. 191).

For the purposes of this inquiry ‘food riot’ can be defined as any gathering, whether planned or spontaneous, that may begin peacefully (which is what a ‘food protest’ would be) but evolves into disorder, leading to loss of control, violence, bodily harm, or damage to property. The terms ‘food riot’ and ‘food protest’ can be understood and discussed together under the phrase ‘food disturbance’ (Gilje, 1996, p. 4). Food disturbances occur and have occurred for obvious reasons: people will go to extreme measures to get the kind, quantity, and quality of food they feel they need for themselves and their families. Food disturbances have existed in all civilisations in history when people are not in complete control of their own food supply: they do not grow all or some of it, they are taxed by landlords or governments, prices (set by others) are beyond their notion of a ‘just price,’ or they are unable to freely determine the disposal of any surplus. Food riots tend to happen more frequently in developing countries than in industrialised ones for obvious reasons: countries with better transportation and communication systems, those with enough wealth to stockpile food for times of need or subsidise its price, can redistribute food geographically in relatively a brief time as needed – feats more difficult in developing countries. In many parts of the world food riots were especially frequent in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, then declined dramatically in number until the 1970s, when riots began again in earnest in developing countries as a result of severe economic austerity measures, including the removal of subsidies on food (Walton & Seddon, 1994, p. 24).

A major subfield in social history, there exists a rich body of scholarly work both documenting and theorising about food disturbances. Riots tell us much about the political, economic, social phenomena of an era, and help us to better understand people who are neither wealthy nor politically prominent and therefore whose lives do not normally become a part of the public historical record. European social historians especially have set the standard for scholarship in the field. Scholars have argued that while food riots can happen at any time in any place, and can range in origin from the carefully staged to spontaneous eruption, there appears to be a method to their madness: food rioters are not faceless, unthinking mobs, but often act in quite logical, deliberate ways. That is, crowds do not just pillage any store, for example, but those stores that they feel have unfairly inflated prices. Rioting, moreover, is largely shaped by its historical and cultural context. While no two riots are ever exactly the same, and each contains a multiplicity of

circumstances, historians have generalised that food riots have fallen into three main categories: first, a blockage or *entrave* where protesters blocked shipments of grain or other foodstuffs shipped from one region to another; second, the price riot or *taxation populaire*, where peasants seized the goods from a retail shop whose prices were deemed too high, which would then be sold for a ‘just price,’ and often (amazingly) the money paid to the merchant. The final form of food riots, the market riot, was simply looting stores and supply depots to protest high prices or the lack of goods (Tilly, C., 1996, pp. 231–4; Thompson, E., 1971, pp. 76–7; Gilje, 1996, p. 6; Walton & Seddon, 1994, pp. 25–6). Modern day riots tend to conform to the latter category of market riots, as looting and destroying property are common factors. In addition are the more calculated, less volatile, demonstrations where the food at issue is ceremoniously dumped on the grounds of, for example, the local government headquarters (Fineran, 2000). The boycotting of food, also a common means of protest in the twentieth century, can be particularly effective, especially when centred on one item such as milk, beer, bread, or grapes, or on a single manufacturer, such as Nestlé (Linden, 1994). Boycotts, however, can evolve into a fully-fledged food riot if participants harass or violently attack those choosing to purchase a targeted item or frequent a targeted store.

A Historiography of Food Riots

Why do people riot over food? The obvious answer, that they riot because they are hungry, does not begin to answer the question, since most who are poor and hungry do not riot. Moreover, why do people riot over particular foods and not others? Rice not coconuts? Tortillas not chiles? Meat not cheese? What intervening variables determine who eventually riots over which foods? As mentioned, historians have analysed and explained food riots in the following ways: as collective action representing the ‘moral economy’ of an era; as part of a so-called ‘female consciousness,’ and as an exhibition of nationalism/patriotism. I will briefly review each one.

The ‘father’ of food riot history, the eminent British historian E.P. Thompson, in 1971 published the article, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’. With ‘The Moral Economy’, a witty, erudite and detailed analysis of food riots in England, Thompson set about to provide a ‘thick description’ of food rioters’ motives in pre-industrial England, an era when subsistence riots happened with great frequency. Thompson, a Marxist historian, used the category of class as his organising principle. Briefly, Thompson argued that English peasant bread riots were symptomatic of a society caught between changing economic and political forces, of an England in the midst of moving from a looser collection of landed gentry to a stronger state, and from a mercantilist, feudal economic system to one of laissez-faire market capitalism. Peasants under the

feudal system were used to bread sold at 'just prices' – that is, an amount reduced for the poor as part of the communal moral ethos. In the shift to an emerging market economy which abandoned the notion of the just price, peasants understandably clung to the older 'moral economy,' Thompson argues. Viewing inexpensive bread prices as an entitlement, when peasants felt the long-held social pact was not being honoured under the new system, they rioted in response (Thompson, E., 1971). People, argued Thompson, thus were not just rioting because they were hungry, but also out of a sense of injustice. Conflicts, Charles Tilly concurs, 'occurred not so much where men were hungry as where they believed that others were unjustly depriving them of food to which they had a moral and political right' (Tilly, C., 1975, p. 389). Eric Hobsbawm, similarly arguing that food disturbances were a pre-industrial mode of exhibiting anger over economic and social inequity, called these 'collective bargaining by riot' (Hobsbawm, 1959, p. 110). As the peasantry evolved into the industrialised working class, conflicts over food were absorbed into and displaced by organised labour strikes. This explains why the number of food riots diminished considerably in the nineteenth century and beyond. Scholars have taken issue with Thompson's moral economy theory – some insist that the theory should focus on the newly emerging middle-class dissatisfaction, others point to prevailing anti-Semitism and local begging customs as factors or see the community or national context as more important – but few if any reject his theory outright. Indeed, nearly all historians studying food riots pay homage to E.P. Thompson for his path-breaking work in creating a multidimensional understanding of food rioting and rioters (Arnold, 1979; Bohstedt, 1988; Bohstedt, 1992; Booth, 1977; Gailus, 1994; Kaplan, S., 1985; Rogers, 1987; Shosham, 1980; Taylor, 1996; Tilly, L., 1983; Williams, 1984).

Since women as well as men participated in food riots, often in unique ways, in recent decades many historians have employed gender as a category of analysis (for example, Davis, 1996; Engel, 1997; Frank, 1985; Hufton, 1971; Hyman, 1980; Kaplan, T., 1982; Ryan, 1989; Smart, 1986; Taylor, 1996). While not disagreeing with the moral economists that much disfavour over food became displaced into general labour issues in the nineteenth century, historians such as Temma Kaplan, Phyllis Hyman and Dana Frank point out that although the number of food riots decreases in the nineteenth century, food disturbances nevertheless continue. Moreover, they argue, food rioting takes on a noticeable female persona, in part because labour unions, the new locus of collective action, largely excluded women. Temma Kaplan, studying early twentieth-century food riots in Barcelona, argues that women participated in food riots as an extension of their assigned and embraced role in the sexual division of labour: caring for home and family, which included food procurement and preparation. Women who accepted the traditional division of labour, argues Kaplan, could be radicalised to action in the public sphere if they were prevented from fulfilling their domestic duties, particularly the feeding

and care of their families. Female participation in food disturbances functioned to ‘politicize . . . the networks of everyday life,’ as women extended their domain and sense of obligation into the public sphere (Kaplan, T., 1982, p. 545).

Dana Frank and Paula Hyman, studying early twentieth-century food riots in New York City’s Lower East Side, concur with Kaplan. Hyman examines a 1902 kosher meat boycott organised and dominated by women that at one time brought crowds of up to 20,000 protesting the high prices of meat. The boycott frequently erupted into violence, including women breaking into butcher shops and flinging meat into the streets, and assaulting those who did not honour the boycott. Hyman sees the boycotting women ‘articulat[ing] a rudimentary grasp of their power as consumers and domestic managers’ (Hyman, 1980, p. 92). While the women ‘did retain a traditional sense of a moral economy in which food should be available at prices which the working classes could afford,’ explains Hyman, in a nod to E.P. Thompson, ‘they were not simply expressing traditional forms of cultural resistance to industrial society imported from the Old Country’, but providing evidence of a ‘modern and sophisticated political mentality emerging in a rapidly changing community’ (ibid, pp. 97, 92). Dana Frank, examining the 1917 cost-of-living protests, similarly sees an emerging female consciousness. As the women protested against rising food prices by focusing on chicken, potatoes, onions and fish, explains Frank, ‘New York’s immigrant Jewish women demonstrated their own perceptions of political economy: who they believed was in power; what they thought should be done to alleviate their distress, and, most importantly, how they believed they as women could affect the economic system in which they were enmeshed’ (Frank, 1985, p. 256. See also, Frieburger, 1984).

While some have returned to such well-researched topics as the French Revolution to employ gender as a category of analysis (Bouton, 1990), not all historians regard gender as a useful framework when determining the meanings of food disturbances (Bohstedt, 1988). For example, Iain J.M. Robertson argues that when examining women’s participation in food riots, at least those in turn-of-the-(nineteenth) century Scotland, using gender as a category of analysis obfuscates the fact that men and women held notions of ownership over the land equally and thus when denied ownership of farmland deemed to be theirs, rioted in the same way for the same reasons. Assuming that women’s protest is distinctly different from “‘normative” masculine protest, and derived from their household role rather than from an underlying legitimizing ideology shared with their male counterparts’, argues Robertson, does a disservice to the women who fully participated as equals with men (Robertson, 1997, p. 187). Robertson neglects to discuss, however, those food disturbances that were comprised largely or exclusively of women.

Along with the moral economy thesis and gender as an analytical framework, another avenue through which to gain insight into the meaning and nature of food riots is the examination of cultural meanings of consumption and their connection

to nationalism. Two American colonial historians, Barbara Clark Smith and Timothy Breen, have examined food disturbances before and during the American Revolution as evidence of a growing sense of nationalism. In her study of over thirty food riots during the American Revolution, Smith sees such disturbances ‘at the intersection of several streams of historical experience,’ and acknowledges as pertinent both the moral economy and the female consciousness theses (Smith, 1994, p. 3). Not only do they contain ‘elements of “the common people’s politics” in England and America’, in their focus on the just price, but since women conducted nearly one-third of riots, Smith argues, they also must be examined in light of ‘women’s substantive, routine participation, not strictly “public” and “private” in nature, in the life of their communities’ (ibid, p. 5). Yet, explains Smith, the riots must be read as entwined directly in the Revolution, as ‘a patriotic action, much like facing redcoats in the battlefield’ (ibid, p. 6). Whether ‘sustaining the buying power of Continental money or dressing “like Indians” in reminiscence of the crowd that had thrown tea into Boston harbor in 1773’, Smith argues that food rioters ‘situated themselves as participants in the patriot cause’ (ibid, p. 8).

While Smith uncovers elements of nationalism in the act of rioting itself, T.H. Breen recognises a growing sense of nationalism developing through the item (including food items) being rioted over as well. In his 1988 article, “‘Baubles of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century’, Breen explores the relation between the growth of national consciousness and the American rejection of the ‘Baubles of Britain’. While noting the importance of women in colonial food disturbances, Breen focuses his attention on the fact that manufactured goods imported from Britain, for the first time readily available to so many people, resulted in ‘the standardization of taste’ (Breen, 1988, p. 82). As consumer goods became politicised in the decades leading up to the Revolution, they took on ‘a radical, new symbolic function’. This politicisation provided a ‘shared language of consumption’ that colonists of all regions and classes could understand and identify with, hence providing a common experience and knowledge base that united them enough to wage war against the mother country (ibid, p. 76). While Breen does not limit his analysis to food but explores the meaning of consumer goods of all kinds, he does focus on the struggle over tea – for Americans one of the best-known and loved stories of the Revolution. Breen explains:

The Tea Act . . . united the colonists as they had never been before. The reason for this new solidarity was not so much that the Americans shared a common political ideology, but rather that the statute affected an item of popular consumption found in almost every colonial household. It was perhaps *the* major article in the development of an eighteenth-century consumer society, a beverage which . . . appeared on the tables of the wealthiest merchants and the poorest labourers. For Americans, therefore, it was not difficult to transmit perceptions of liberty and rights through a discourse on tea (ibid, pp. 97–8).

‘Throughout America,’ Breen relates of the infamous Boston Tea Party, ‘the ceremonial destruction of tea strengthened the bonds of political solidarity’ (ibid, p. 99).

While this admirable work on food riots and protests contributes much toward explaining people’s *mentalités* and motives for rioting, missing is an in-depth examination, a Geertzian ‘thick description,’ of the foods themselves. A sustained, cultural exploration of the very food at the core of the disturbance – the tea, meat, milk, or even such modern industrialised products as Coca-Cola, as will be described – can provide rich information about the connection between food and cultural/national identity. A foray into the meanings of the foods themselves in their historical and cultural context can add yet one more layer, one very important layer, of understanding. In addition to Breen several of the works previously discussed do give a hint of such analysis. Although Dana Frank focuses on gender, for example, she does spend a paragraph touching on the symbolic significance of the foods being rioted over. While the price of food seems to have been high in general, according to Frank, the Jewish women were focusing in particular on the boycotting of chicken, onions, potatoes and fish. Frank writes:

Many women initially joined out of a sense of limits reached, as in the case of the woman who asserted her continuing right to butter. Those limits boiled down to an unwillingness to altogether abandon traditional foods. Potatoes, onions, and chickens were dietary staples to which they believed they had a basic right if they were to fulfill their responsibility to truly sustain their families. More importantly, the rituals of preparing kosher foods played a crucial role in the religious and cultural self-definition of New York’s immigrant Jewish people . . . Women bought and served traditional foods not only out of mere habit, but also because those foods expressed their commitment to a religious life’ (Frank, 1985, pp. 276–7).

When Frank describes the cultural and religious importance of the foods being boycotted in terms of the women’s self-definition she notes their cultural significance: chicken, potatoes and onions were important, even crucial, parts of the Shabbat dinner. Without them, could there even be a Sabbath, seems to be the unspoken question. Fish, Frank somewhat inadequately explains, was boycotted because it could not be served without the boycotted onions. A thick description of these foods in their historical and cultural context could provide further compelling analysis. Moreover, the foods city officials tried to introduce as substitutes reveals all the more how culturally important chicken, onions, potatoes and fish were. The large quantities of rice, smelt, Brazilian beans and hominy that the city provided as substitutes were (not surprisingly) unequivocally rejected. Explicitly linking both cultural/religious identity and her new national identity with food, one protester’s sign read, ‘We American [sic] Can Not live on rice’ (quoted in ibid, p. 277).

Similarly, Paula Hyman, in her gender-focused analysis of the New York City kosher meat boycott of 1902, also briefly points to cultural elements. ‘The neighborhood, a form of female network, thus provided the locus of community for the boycott,’ Hyman explains. ‘All were giving up meat together, celebrating dairy shabbosim together, and contributing to the boycott fund’ (Hyman, 1980, p. 99). Fortunately for scholars of food, historian of United States immigration Hasia Diner in her forthcoming work examines the cultural and social meanings of the turmoil and contestation that existed among Jewish immigrants, including such food disturbances as boycotts and riots (Diner, 2001). Finally, while T.H. Breen gets as close to such a cultural examination of the foods as any of the works I have discussed, moving tea and its place in colonial American history squarely within the realm of cultural history, as anthropologist Sidney Mintz illustrates in his exceptional work on the historical, cultural, political, and economic meanings of sugar, there is much more that could be done on the cultural meanings and functions of tea – itself purely a product of British colonialism – in colonial America that can provide even more evidence of its centrality to life at the time and thus the catalyst for boycotts, riots, and even revolution (Mintz, 1985).

While my extensive survey of the literature of food disturbances is not exhaustive, I have found only one sustained cultural analysis of a riot in terms of the food being rioted over. Benjamin Orlove, in a fine article entitled ‘Meat and Strength: The Moral Economy of A Chilean Food Riot’, builds on Thompson’s moral economy theory to argue that in 1905 the middle classes of Santiago, Chile rioted over rising food prices because it prevented them from purchasing their accustomed amount of meat. In this particular historical and cultural context, in this particular ‘moral economy’ (Orlove, 1997, p. 255), consumption of meat – or the lack thereof – reflected one’s place in the rigid social and political hierarchy where powerful *hacendados* (plantation owners) controlled much of the power, including the animals eventually showing up on the table for consumption. Not being able to afford meat anymore ‘undercut a deeply held sense of [Santiagoans’] social position’ (ibid, p. 256). Taking time to carefully develop and articulate the social, political, economic and cultural fabric of Chilean society at the beginning of the twentieth century, Orlove argues convincingly, ‘It is the distinctiveness of the specific moral economy [of Chile in the early 1900s] that allows a piece of beef to make the difference between an acceptable and unacceptable pot of stew’ (ibid, p. 260).

Cultural Meanings of Food in Food Disturbances: An American Backdrop

As a United States historian with a specialisation in the twentieth-century, it is possible to point to only a few food riots (other than those discussed by Frank and Hyman) during this century on which to focus a sustained cultural analysis of the

foods involved. The United States has always been regarded as an overflowing cornucopia, and while there certainly have been and remain many people without enough to eat, in comparison to most other countries in the world, the United States ranks high if not the highest in the number of calories per person available for consumption in the food supply. Thus food problems in this country are less about hunger and more about health deficiencies resulting from too much food, or too much of the wrong kinds of food.

Any cultural analysis, then, of food disturbances in the United States must be made within the backdrop of the long and deeply held notion of abundance. I have written elsewhere about what I think is an important study of American culture and politics in light of this profusion of material wealth, economic historian David Potter's 1954 study, *People of Plenty* (Bentley, 1995).¹ In his economic analysis of what used to be unselfconsciously called the 'American character', Potter argued that the United States and its citizens have been shaped, blessed, but also at times intellectually and socially hindered by inhabiting one of the most resource-rich and economically successful countries in the world. The United States' long history of plenty – a product of both natural resources and technological innovation – has molded who Americans are and how they see the world. This wealth, in turn, has shaped notions of such abstract terms as 'freedom', 'democracy', as well as immigration, foreign policy, and assumptions about individualism. Because 'abundance' and 'democracy' are often conflated, many Americans (and, indeed, many immigrants to the United States) (mistakenly) equate such political notions as liberty and equality with capitalism. Other countries' experiences do not suggest the same equation. Even though all Americans have not partaken of this abundance, Potter insists nevertheless that the promise of this prosperity still affects the culture at large as well as individuals in particular. This overarching culture of abundance helps explain low political activism and voter participation, the lack of a viable socialist movement, and the American myth of classlessness, despite the ever-growing economic disparity between rich and poor (Potter, 1954).

Of course food is a central element of this abundance. Thus the backdrop of material wealth affects the kind and frequency of food disturbances in the United States, especially since the 1920s. Food disturbances differ in this country (and in other industrialised countries) from those in developing countries, such as the riots mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. In the 1930s and 1940s, for example, farmers protested the removal of price supports, women boycotted dairies over high milk prices, and the public decried the destruction of edible grain and pork during the Depression (in the attempt to prop up falling food prices). Other food disturbances have occurred since then, but most often in the form of boycotts and hunger strikes to protest and publicise a particular social or political cause (Bentley, 1998, pp. 56–8; Gilje, 1996, pp. 149–69; Poppendieck, 1986). While significant and worthy of study in their own right, these are not the food riots of hungry,

angry people hoping they have enough food to feed their families. For example, late-1990s riots on college campuses over restrictions on alcoholic beverages ('Student Rioters Demand the "Right to Party"') need to be analysed as 'food disturbances', not only within this context of abundance, but against the unique backdrop of the history and culture of alcohol in the United States: the temperance movement, Prohibition, American Protestantism, fears of non-Protestant immigration, and social and symbolic meanings of alcoholic beverages (For example, Edmunds, 1999; Fuller, 1996).

While Potter's ideas are significant and compelling, they are subject to debate, however. For example, Mark Weiner, in his fine exploration of Coca-Cola's rise to becoming a totem drink during the Second World War, effectively details the cultural, social, political and economic significance of Coke in the United States during the War, and addresses the connection between consumerism and democracy. In his article, 'Consumer Culture and Participatory Democracy: The Story of Coca-Cola during World War II', Weiner queries: can the promotion of a highly sugared, caffeine-laced soft drink comprise something more than just clever marketing designed to increase consumption? Can drinking Coca-Cola hold meaning for people beyond that of a mild, stimulating thirst quencher? Exploring both what corporate image-makers wanted Coke to represent to Americans, and what Coke actually meant to civilians, distributors, and soldiers, Weiner describes the influence of commercial capitalism on democracy not as largely negative, as Potter and others generally conclude, but as complex and layered in its meanings. As advertisers, American corporations, and the US government co-operated to rally the American home front firmly behind the war effort, Weiner provides us with compelling evidence of how corporate conglomerates defined war aims in terms of commodities. Yet, Wiener argues, the soft drink gained this prominence in part because Coca-Cola held important personal meanings for many Americans, to the extent that it stirred political action and symbolised powerful ideas about American democracy.

Because he so thoroughly demonstrates the iconic nature of Coca-Cola, Weiner convincingly argues for the cultural importance of the soft drink in the lunch counter sit-ins of the post-Second World War Civil Rights era. Following Breen's lead, Weiner sees the possibility for 'participatory democracy' existing in consumer goods, in this case, meaning the right to sit at a drugstore lunch counter and order a cold, sweet glass of Coke. By the 1950s Coca-Cola had become such a prominent symbol of American-ness, that for many African Americans equal access to democracy, explains Weiner, meant being able to order and consume a Coke, just as any other American would, at a public eating establishment. Being denied access to the lunch counter at Woolworths symbolised in part the denial of full citizenship to African Americans (Weiner, 1996).

Like the symbolic meaning of Coca-Cola in lunch counter sit-ins, there is plenty of work to be done exploring the cultural meanings of foods in food disturbances,

not only in the United States but globally as well. Historians of Europe, for example, have employed the backdrop of the two World Wars to detail fine accounts of bread riots in Russia, and of women's protests over food scarcity in First World War Berlin and in 1942 Vichy France (Davis, 1996; Engel, 1997; Ryan, 1989). But there is room for so much more. One cannot think of food disturbances in European countries without mentioning the late-1990s protests by the French over American tariffs on foie gras. Images of a ransacking of a McDonald's, and of French chefs and restaurant owners throwing food at the French Parliament to demand lower taxes, are prime moments for cultural analysis ('Chefs Protest Tax'; 'Farmers Protest'). Also, ripe for exploration are the cultural and symbolic meanings of the rice, tortillas, onions and bread of the 1990s food riots, as well as such food disturbances in history as the salt demonstrations in 1940s colonial India. The possibilities are numerous, and the results, I argue, most illuminating.

Note

1. Portions of this paragraph were taken directly from Bentley, A. (1995), 'American Abundance Examined: David M. Potter's *People of Plenty* and the Study of Food', *Digest* 15, pp. 20–4. I would also like to thank Trish Lobenfeld and Jon Deutsch for their research assistance.

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French Bread and Algerian Wine: Conflicting Identities in French Algeria

Willy Jansen

When France started to occupy Algeria in the 1830s, it brought a food tradition that was alien to the local cuisine. The food habits of the Christian and Jewish colonists conflicted with Islamic dietary laws. Algerians objected to pork and wine, both forbidden by Islam. They refused to eat meat of animals not slaughtered according to Islamic rules. The Islamic dietary rules and the hygienic, medical, cultural or social motives behind them have received ample attention (e.g. Douglas, 1970, 1982, 1984; Simoons, 1961). The taboo on pork formed the focus of analysis; less attention was paid to the symbolic and social significance of wine and bread. Studies of bread have been mainly descriptive (e.g. Bacon, 1990; Bornstein-Johanssen, 1975; Bruneton, 1975). Bread for Muslims is imbued with religious meaning, although less pronounced than the religious feeling that bread, especially in combination with wine, may evoke among Christians. A study of the social and cultural meanings of bread and wine during the colonisation of Algeria, illuminates how boundaries of a nation, as well as of religion and gender, are produced and negotiated through food. What were the associations of Algerians with bread and wine and how did they react to their bread being replaced by French bread and their wheatfields by French vineyards? I will first discuss the production and meaning of traditional Arab bread and other foods based on cereals, before detailing the effects that French colonisation had on Algerian agriculture and cuisine. In the subsequent sections I will elaborate on the confrontation of foods and how food was used to express and change collective identities. I will argue that bread and other cereal products, both in their form, substance, production technology and gender relatedness, served as symbols of identity, but that their impact and value as an identity marker was limited, due to changes in production techniques and in the gendered division of labour, and because of their low place occupied in the hierarchy of foods.

The data for this article were collected during anthropological fieldwork between 1976 and 1984, in a newly built desert resettlement village in Eastern Algeria and

a large town in Western Algeria. The 1,200 villagers were nearly exclusively dependent on date growing and oasis gardening, whereas of the about 60,000 inhabitants of the town, 15 per cent of the working population gained an income from agriculture, and 8 per cent in the agricultural processing industry. The others worked in administration, industry, construction and public works, commerce and services (RGPH, 1977; Jansen, 1981, 1987). Descriptions of the present refer to the time of my fieldwork. Additional information was gained through archival research in France and from secondary sources on Algeria.

Bread as a Staple

Over the past century and a half, wheat has been the primary dietary energy source, and bread has been the staple of life for Algerians. Bread is an economic way to consume wheat, and thus the obvious way to ward off starvation. At the time of my fieldwork, nearly 56 per cent of the expenditure of an average Algerian family went on food and drink, and more than 10 per cent was spent on bread and other cereal products. Per head, they consumed 185 kg cereals (wheat and barley) a year. This wheat consumption was substantial, compared with the 16 kg of meat (15 per cent of expenditure) and the 56 kg of fresh vegetables consumed yearly (*Annuaire Statistique*, 1981, p. 343).

Breakfast for the poorest villagers in colonial times consisted of a spicy gruel to which some fat was added. As soon as the family could afford it, they would eat bread. The more affluent families drank sugary tea with their bread, rather than water, and the bread was spread with salty home-churned butter (Champault, 1969, p.174). At the time of my fieldwork, villagers breakfasted on bread of various kinds, plain or with clarified butter, oil, dates or peppers depending on the season and their means, plus tea. Urban Algerians commonly ate French bread, with French or Dutch butter and a bowl of coffee with milk. Guests were offered extras such as olive oil, jam or honey. At midday and in the evening, Algerians prefer to eat a warm meal, although poor peasants sometimes have to make do with bread and dates for lunch when they work in fields too far away from home, and students and office workers may prefer to buy a modern sandwich. In all warm meals, both in colonial times and at present, bread is an important component. The warm dish it accompanies can be extremely simple. On one occasion, at a celebration among poor peasants, a group of five visitors had to share one plate of two fried eggs. Such rural frugality contrasts starkly with the lavish meals served by the urban rich. But bread is on all tables. Bread is widely used as an edible utensil. Pieces are torn from a loaf and soaked in the sauce or used as pincers to take pieces of vegetable or meat with one's fingers. Thin, pliable bread may be folded into a cup to scoop up food from the common dish.

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Figure 11.1 Algerian village girl selling French bread

In village life, different types of bread, representing different production processes and conditions, coexist. Especially after rainy evenings I am confronted with the variety of bread in the oasis village. Normally, I buy a French baguette for breakfast from a girl who sells the French bread her father brings from a bakery in town, 10 km away. But rain causes power cuts, turning the oven cold and the water tap dry. The girl will not knock at my window in the morning. The villagers know better than to depend solely on electric ovens and pumps. One woman regularly sells flat, round bread, which her relative in a neighbouring village makes at home and bakes in a communal oven, and another woman always makes some extra loaves to sell when she bakes her family's bread in a terracotta pan. If neither one of them has any bread left, the village women take their handmills and start milling to make their own bread.

Bread in Algeria has many forms and names. The variety of products known as bread, makes it hard to give a precise definition. The most commonly used criteria – wheat flour, fermented dough, and oven baking – would not cover all the varieties. The flour from wheat and/or barley may be blended with other flours such as acorn, the dough may not be leavened, and many types of bread are not baked in an oven. I will follow Balfet, who defines bread as 'food made from a dough produced with flour (cereal flour in most cases), kneaded before being baked (which distinguishes it from gruels), and baked when dry (which distinguishes it from

boiled or fried pastas). However, there is still ambiguity as to the distinction between bread and pastry' (1975, p. 308).

Basically the bread can be divided into four different classes. The first is *khubz ad-dâr*; lit. 'bread of the house', prepared at home from wheat flour, water, salt and yeast. It is baked in a modern gas oven, if the family is rich enough to own one, or in the communal oven of the neighbourhood or village. The basic form is flat and round, a few centimetres thick. For richer versions, butter, green anis seed and sesame seed, or sugar are added. These enriched breads are made for Ramadan or other celebrations and feast days. In small villages, modern gas ovens or public ovens are seldom available. Nor are such amenities needed for the second type of bread called *matlû`* or *khubz at-tajîn*. This round, flattened 'pan-bread' or in French *galette*, made of wheat semolina, yeast, water and salt, is baked in a previously heated earthenware or cast-iron plate on a charcoal or gas fire, first on one side and then the other. It is the most regular kind of home-made bread. When it is made of corn, it keeps for several days if kept in a dry place. When reheated it becomes almost fresh again. In practice, home-made bread is seldom kept, but eaten at once. The quality of this bread may differ, depending on the length of kneading, the addition of barley or sorghum, the amount of bran, or the quality of leavening used. It can be improved by adding oil, salty butter or aromatic herbs. The third type, variously called *raqâq*, *rfîs*, *khubz-ftir* or *tarîd*, are thin pancakes made of well-kneaded but unleavened dough. They are baked for half a minute on a large round hot convex sheet of brass or iron, balanced on stones over a wood fire or on a gas ring. This form of bread-making is well suited for nomadic life (Perry, 1994: 87). The pan is easy to transport, light and unbreakable, and little fuel is needed. The bread is quickly made, easy to take, and good to hold. Unleavened pan bread is a perfect solution when unannounced guests arrive or when, due to power cuts, no bakery bread is sold. The operations requiring the most time in the normal preparation of bread, the rising of the dough and the heating of the oven, are not needed here. The sometimes paper-thin sheets are piled up and folded, making packages with distinct, fairly crisp layers. They can be eaten plain as an accompaniment to the main dish, or stuffed with vegetables, sheep fat, cheese or meat to make a complete meal. For sweet use, the buttered sheets can be filled with almonds mixed with sugar. Baked in an oven, and drenched with honey, they become *baklava*. The fourth type of bread, and increasingly widespread in Algeria, is French bread: long *baguettes* of white, leavened, wheat flour. It is never made at home, but bought in a store or from street vendors. Despite the many different types of bread, the major distinction is that between Arab bread and French bread. In Egypt, Arab bread is aptly called *baladi* bread, meaning bread from my country or home, in Algeria one tends to use the generic Arabic words *khubz* or *kisra* for Arab bread and French words like *baguette* or *pain* for French bread. The Algerian expression 'Whether I eat *khubz* or *kisra*, it is all the same' is often used to indicate

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Figure 11.2 Algerian peasant woman baking bread

that it makes no difference whatever choice is made. Although the unmarked Arabic term *khubz* could sometimes be used for all bread, including French bread, the reverse was not found. The division between Arab bread and French bread was at the same time a division between home-made bread and industrially-made bread, between bread made by women and that made by men.

Cereals are also consumed in various other forms. With a minimum of ingredients – grain, water, salt, a handful of vegetables – poor women manage to cook an amazing variety of meals. The introduction of sometimes very fine grades into each form of bread or wheat dish, helps to break the monotony of an apparently uniform food. Apart from baking, wheat can be boiled, as in soups or morning porridge, steamed, as in couscous, or roasted and mixed with honey, butter and cinnamon, as in desserts. The consumption of cereals in the form of macaroni and spaghetti has also become widespread. The most typical North African wheat dish is of course couscous, next to bread a staple of the traditional Algerian diet. This fine grain-like pasta of semolina flour is eaten as a main dish with meat, fish or vegetable sauce, or as dessert with sour milk and sprinkled with sugar, raisins, dates or nuts. Couscous is an essential part of all life-cycle rituals, with particular preparations or additives for particular situations.

With wheat, and bread in particular, taking such a central place in the Algerian menu, what are the cultural values attributed to this nutrient? All food is considered

a gift of God that should be received with gratitude and approached reverently. Food is shown proper respect by saying 'In the name of God' before the meal is started, by taking it only with the clean right hand, and by touching only one's own share of food on the common plate. From a young age on children are taught not to waste food, not to talk or laugh unnecessarily while eating, and to approach food in a clean state. The sharing of food is a central element of each religious ritual (Jansen, 1997).

Bread, more than any other food, contains God's blessing, *baraka*. When studying Algerian Arabic, I had to translate the sentence: 'The worker of bread is a blessed man, because the bread contains *baraka*' (Tapiéro, 197, p. 47). Bread is the symbol of food and of life in general; the term *'aysh* (life) is often used for bread. It therefore deserves proper religious respect.¹ The bread is broken, not cut, to which some add the prayer 'in the name of God'. Crumbs should be picked up and leftover bread should not be thrown out, but carefully collected and used for other dishes or to feed the animals (Goichon, 1927, p. 263; Lizot, 1973, p. 41). Because it is thought that bread has power, over time it has been used in various magical practices and beliefs. Goichon noted that it was part of a ritual to wean a child without tears (1927, p. 40), and I saw mothers use it to cure their child's hiccups. Magical precautions were taken to protect wheat, bread and bread-making utensils against the evil eye and other harmful influences, and magical beliefs reinforced the taboo on wasting bread and wheat (Champault, 1969, p. 70–2, 173; Gaudry, 1928, p. 153). Wheat and bread, or its metonyms mills and bread baskets, function in various rituals linking agricultural production and human reproduction, symbolising life, fertility, and abundance.

French Colonisation

How did the production, consumption and meaning of bread fare under the colonisation process? The French conquest of Algeria started in 1830, and in 1848 Algeria became a legal part of France. By 1850, the French military had come to realise that the occupation they had achieved by force of arms needed consolidation. The answer was found in mass settlement and a stranglehold over key markets. This policy was not achieved by imposing colonial authority on existing patterns of economic and social organisation, but by their destruction. Well-conceived raids on villages, trees and crops ruined the country, inhabitants were massacred or driven into the less fertile areas where they could not support themselves with the traditional methods of agriculture under the mounting population pressure. After having survived the raids and the displacements, the Algerian population was further decimated by epidemics, famines and revolts, such as the cholera epidemic in 1867, the great famine of 1868 and the violent repression of the peasant rebellion

of 1871. The indigenous population suffered many losses. Although Algeria was made part of France, Algerians did not profit in terms of citizenship. While all children born of alien parents were automatically naturalised and given the same civil rights as the French, Muslims remained second-class citizens. Only a handful of Muslims who were prepared to abandon their exemption to French law on matters like marriage and property, became French citizens.

Property structures came under serious pressure. Special laws, like the *Senatus-consulte* of 1863 and the *Warnier Law* of 1870, were aimed at the break-up of the tribes and the constitution of individual property. By throwing all land held by Muslims onto the open market, it was made available for purchase or seizure by European colonists. The rural communities lost their best arable lands and forests to the colonial public domain and to the settlers, mainly of French, Italian, Spanish and Maltese origin. Every uprising or revolt was followed by widespread confiscation of private, tribal and communal Muslim lands. The confiscated lands were then redistributed to the settlers, along with improvement grants. By 1934 the colonists had one-third of the arable land. Specific to colonial agriculture was its orientation towards the needs of the colonial powers rather than the food needs of the Algerian population. Colonialism brought little but stagnation in agriculture, especially in the traditional sector. Between 1850 and 1910, cereal production achieved a growth rate of 1.7 per cent a year, but was completely stagnant between then and 1955. With most of the best lands in the hands of the settlers and the colonial public domain, while most of the indigenous peasantry worked fragmented unproductive plots on steep slopes, the average yield of cereals per hectare of cultivated land in the colonial areas was two to three times higher than in the 'native' sector (Bennoune, 1976, pp. 13–14). As this was not enough to feed the population, imports grew until more than half of the corn needed was imported from France.

Initially, the main crop continued to be corn. Grapes were grown, but mainly for the production of raisins. In order to encourage the production of wine, Algerian wines imported into France were exempted from customs duties in 1851, despite opposition from metropolitan winegrowers, who feared competition. But this measure boosted Algerian viticulture less than the wine crisis in France in 1875, when *phylloxera* devastated the French vineyards. Many ruined French winegrowers emigrated to French Algeria. From then on, the wine cultivation area expanded rapidly. On the eve of the revolution, in 1953, 403,000 ha, about 10 per cent of the cultivated and planted agricultural land, had been planted with grapevines. The production of about 20 million hectolitres of wine was almost totally exported (Benamrane, 1980, p. 92). Industrial crops like tobacco and flax, and export products like citrus fruit had also taken an increasing share of the land. While the Muslim population was hungry for bread, the former grain fields now produced

wine for French tables. Wine formed some 50 per cent of the annual trade receipts of the economy, before the advent of oil and gas (Clegg, 1971, pp. 23–30, 76). After independence in 1962, and in the 1990s at the instigation of Muslim fundamentalists, many vineyards were cut down and replaced by wheat fields. But after oil and gas, wine is still at third place in bringing in export revenues.

The changes in agricultural production that colonisation brought about were followed by changes in the processing of agricultural products. Relevant in this context was the near total (90 per cent) control of industry and commerce by European settlers. This meant that the wheat trade, and the processing of wheat in mills and bakeries were largely controlled by Europeans. Their mills were powered by electricity rather than by women's hands or small streams, their bakeries produced long *batons* and *baguettes* rather than round Arab bread and *milles feuilles* made of puff pastry rather than from separate paper-thin layers of pastry.

The Construction of Identity Through Bread and Wine

Several scholars have shown how the preparation, consumption and exchange of food has functions for the social order (e.g. Douglas, 1982, 1984; Goody, 1982; Lévi-Strauss 1970, 1973, 1978). The selection of food, its volume and ways of preparation, its composition and presentation, the use of utensils, seating arrangements and table manners, all confirm the bond within a social group. Food defines 'us', and at the same time it differentiates 'us' from 'them'. Through food, status is negotiated and social boundaries are drawn. Food is a tool in making and breaking social hierarchies. Bahloul (1983), Bromberger (1994), Elias (1969), Goody (1982), Mennell (1985), Sjögren-de Beauchain (1988 and 1991), Yamani (1994) and Zubaida (1994) showed how the art of cooking and the act of eating express and establish class, religious or ethnic differences. Food and food customs also draw lines between men and women, and masculinity and femininity in many different ways (Dubisch, 1986; Jansen, 1997). Food figures prominently in social self-definitions and is an important strategy in identity politics and practices of distinction (Bourdieu, 1979; Bryant et al, 1985; Chiva, 1979; Simoons, 1961). As food is used to define the self, to draw lines between the self and other and to negotiate the status order, one could ask how bread and wine have helped to create and maintain the order between the French colonists and the Algerian colonised. And how do religion and gender come in? How are bread and wine used to express and construct ethnic identity? To answer these questions, I will first look at the ranking of the different types of bread and their association with certain groups. At first sight this ranking seems to follow closely the social hierarchy, but a closer look at ritual meals and wastage reveals the Algerian subtext and a different positioning of self.

Arab Bread Versus French Bread

The perceptions of self and other were operative on the very first morning the young girl knocked at my window to sell bread. She expected me, as a foreigner, to become a customer of French bread. Not knowing the village practices, I would not find out until several days later what other types of bread were available and where to buy them. Even then, the woman who sold Arab bread would do so hesitatingly to me. She excused herself that the bread's being old and dark was not up to my standards. In my buying behaviour I unknowingly confirmed the dominant view that French bread was the best bread and thus best suited for foreigners. This ranking was carried to the extreme by people who excused themselves for the quality of the Algerian French bread. They wanted me to confirm that French bread in France was better than French bread in Algeria, which in turn was supposed to be better than Arab bread in Algeria. They deprecatingly called the latter coarse, black, or old. In their eagerness to put down Arab bread, they claimed Europeaness by showing themselves knowledgeable about French and even metropolitan food.

A crisis in identity is visible in the complex attitude towards French things. Like other colonised people, the Algerians identify upward with the dominant power which claims cultural and technological superiority, by positively valuing French products while deprecating and disrespecting their own group and its products. In this context the term Arab is often used by Algerians themselves as a term of abuse or depreciation, 'Arab made' is used as a synonym for 'badly made', and Arab bread is thus seen as low-quality bread. In this hierarchical, dichotomic view, French bread is whiter, purer, lighter, better; Algerian bread, produced in the villages and urban shanty towns, the so-called *village nègre*, is dark like its consumers, heavy and of low quality. The cartoonist Hârûn exposed with humour the self-humiliation of Algerians in this respect. In one cartoon, a street vendor observes that no-one wants to buy the clothes he is selling. Only after he attaches labels 'Made in France' and 'Made in the US', does a large crowd gather and fight for his wares (Hârûn, 1981, p. 3). In another cartoon, a man sees a large crowd trying to enter a store. He thinks they must be selling refrigerators or ovens, both scarce in Algeria, until he sees a man coming out carrying French loaves of bread (Hârûn n.d., p. 4). A hundred thirty years of colonisation have left deep marks in the Algerian psyche.

Yet there is a subtext to this simplified hierarchy. People's valuations of bread are far more complex. Subalterns may partly adopt the dominant ideology, especially when talking to others perceived as belonging to the dominant group, but they have at the same time their own alternative interpretations. The appreciation of French products is mixed with hatred and resentment towards anything French or

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Figure 11.3 Foreign made. Hârûn, Ahmad (1981) *Zawâhir 2, Apparences* Alger: SNED, p.3 Algerian cartoons, like Arabic texts, have to be read from right to left.

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Figure 11.4 The struggle for bread. Hârûn, Ahmad (n.d., probably 1980) *Zawâhir*, Alger: SNED, p.4. Algerian cartoons, like Arabic texts, have to be read from right to left.

European. Alternative meanings come to the fore in the dealings with bread, rather than in the idiom about it. This was visible in three instances: during ritual meals, in the notions of health and sickness, and in the wastage of bread.

The valuation of bread was reversed, and homemade Arab bread valued over bought French bread, in the context of rituals. Bread offered to guests should preferably be homemade. Elsewhere, I have argued that the construction of identity is more pronounced in ritual meals than in daily meals (Jansen, 1997). The same can be seen in Algeria. Especially for large ritual meals at engagements, weddings, or circumcisions, an effort is made to serve Arab bread rather than French bread. Ritual meals establish relations outside the family. As Mauss said: ‘To give something is to give a part of oneself . . . a part of one’s nature and substance, while to receive

something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence' (Mauss, 1970, p. 10). By offering home-made foods, Algerians offer 'the salt of the house', the *milh ad-dâr*. The salt signifies the essence, the intimacy, the qualities and the honour of the family. Home-made foods symbolically represent the heart and soul of the family. By tasting the food, the guests accept the relation that is offered through the food and show respect to the host family. By savouring its quality, they will know the qualities of the family. By offering home-made food during rituals, the family partakes in the status competition which rests ultimately on the culinary and organisational skills and abilities of its women. The identity and the status of the in-group is represented and the dignity of self is restored.

Also in the practice and idiom of health and sickness, Arab bread was preferred. French bread was regularly indicated as the cause of constipation. Many people did not eat the soft, white inner parts of French bread, because they were considered unhealthy. Home-made bread was considered healthier, more nutritive, tastier and richer. Moreover, women who still made their own bread would be proud of the economic independence of the family and of their knowledge, skill and dexterity in producing a wholesome food. It showed that it was better to eat black bread in your own house than honey at your neighbours (Lunde & Wintle, 1984, p. 61).²

A subtext was also visible in the wastage of bread. What struck me during every visit to Algeria, was the large amount of bread thrown away. Algeria was often hit by famines in the past, and also more recently the country has come precariously close to famine conditions, due to periodically poor rains and runoff, fragile food distribution systems, limited foreign exchange and political conflicts. Dietary energy supplies in Algeria rose between 1961 and 1977 by 24 per cent, but this was not sufficient to meet daily energy needs. Protein intake per capita (63 g per day) remained below the world average (69.3 g per day), although it was higher than the average for developing countries (Weinbaum, 1982, pp. 3–4, 20). In 1981, the daily average calorie intake of 2,425 calories was still below the FAO standard of 2,450 calories (*Annuaire Statistique*, 1981, p. 345). These figures show that Algerians are not starving and that their diet has improved and diversified, but that many among the urban and rural poor are still undernourished or even go hungry. In the light of this relative poverty, combined with the taboos on wasting bread, any wastage of bread deserves attention. For this, a closer look at the garbage pail is needed.

Garbage pails figure prominently in the cartoons of the critical press. In one of them, a man buys bread in a bakery. Asked how much he wants, he answers 'enough'. But when he enters his door with several loaves in his arms, he passes the garbage pail full of wasted bread (Hârûn, 1984, p. 27). In this cartoon the wastage is related to the Algerian pride of the provider in always having more than enough on the table. The quantity and quality of the food provided, as well as the ability to show hospitality to any unexpected guest, is the first and foremost status indicator in

Algerian society. Abundant hospitality has been mentioned earlier as a central value in Algerian society (Daumas, 1869/1983, pp. 281–330, and 1858/1988, pp. 81–6), as well as for other Mediterranean countries (du Boulay, 1991; Pitt-Rivers, 1977), and its prevalence is so persistent that Herzfeld has even suggested taking hospitality as a typical gloss to understand the area's cultural unity rather than honour (Herzfeld, 1987, p. 75). However, in Algeria this old cultural value originating from desert laws has retained particular poignancy as a status marker during the period of socialism after independence, as the use of other status markers like houses, cars or modern luxuries was severely limited by the government's restrictions on imports. In a context in which people spend more than half of their income on food, honour and authority for the men are mainly expressed by providing an evident abundance of food for the family and by giving it away freely to guests and the poor, and for the women by spending several hours a day cooking complicated dishes. In this respect food can be considered a central marker of one's personal identity. It is a sign of one's status when there is enough food for everybody; the thrown-out pieces testify that one has more than one needs or can offer to others.

But not all leftovers are thrown away. Closer inspection of the garbage pails reveals that it is mostly French bread that is carelessly discarded. Home-made Arab bread is seldom thrown away, but re-used in other dishes or freshened by holding it above a flame. When asked about wastage, people confess that they throw away the inner white part for health reasons, and that they do not save leftover baguettes because French bread turns hard as stone in the dry heat, or becomes impossible to chew when stored in a plastic bag. When reheated, French bread easily becomes hard, difficult to break and bite, and useless for picking up sauce

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Figure 11.5 “How many shall I give you?” “Give enough.” Hârûn, Ahmad (1984) *Zawâhir 3*, Alger: Al-mu’asasat al-wataniyyat al-kitâb, p.27. Algerian cartoons, like Arabic texts, have to be read from right to left.

and food. In short, French bread is less worth saving. The wastage seems to express the subdominant view of French bread as unhealthy, cheap, of low quality, and not durable. Even so, older people especially try to restore some of the old respect for bread. One can see them collecting discarded pieces of bread to feed to the animals, or hear them scolding the younger generation for such waste. I saw old men picking up pieces of bread from the street and putting them reverently on a windowsill, or adding water to a garbage pail full of bread so that the pigeons in the square could feed on it. These actions draw even more attention to the disdain of all the other Algerians for this symbol of Frenchness.

Wine and Meat

Algerian disrespect for French food is even stronger where wine and pork are concerned. These substances, more than bread, divided the European Christians and Jews from the Algerian Muslims. Wine and other alcoholic drinks are forbidden by the Koran (Wensinck, 1978, p. 994). From the beginning of Islam, wine was considered an expensive, foreign product associated with Christians and Jews. In French Algeria viniculture was almost completely in the hands of the colonists (Benachenou, 1980, p. 31). Wine became Algeria's leading farm export. Some Algerians do drink their share of the good-quality wine that is produced in Algeria, but there is general disapproval of its consumption. The sale of wine is confined to dark storerooms, expensive tourist restaurants, or illicit wine-cellar. That the French consume it in such large quantities is seen by many Muslims as a sign of the French lack of sobriety, self-control and virtuousness.³

Even more than wine, the French predilection for pork is viewed with disgust and contempt. Religious prohibitions concerning pork and impure meat from not ritually slaughtered animals, have ingrained themselves in the human psyche and the bodily experience of many Muslims. Even mentioning that a product may contain pork fat causes people to mimic nausea. Some people told me they were sure they would vomit if they ate pork. The idea of drinking or eating blood products also caused expressions of revulsion. Animals slaughtered by Christians are not properly bled to death, the meat may therefore contain this impurity and should be avoided. That Christians drink wine as a symbol of the blood of Christ is thus doubly disturbing.⁴ Religious dietary laws are embodied in the consumption of and physical reaction to specific foods, which in turn is a practice of social identity.

Algerians would say: 'We can marry Christians, but we cannot eat with them. We can eat with Jews, but we cannot marry them.' Jewish foods, except for wine, are fit for Muslims because Jewish dietary laws also exclude pork and impure meats. Jews formed 25 per cent of the French citizens in colonial Algeria. A sizeable proportion of the settlers were Jewish, and they exerted pressure as a result of which Algeria's native Jews were given a superior status by the colonising French

from the start. Unlike the Muslims, the Algerian Jews were given French citizenship from the initial stages on, together with all the economic and political rights this entailed, and in time they used this to claim being part of the 'European' or 'French' population. This aspiration to a European identity by the Algerian Jews, visible in the adoption of French names, language and clothing items, required, however, that they identify themselves as different from and superior to the Muslims (Friedman, 1988, pp. Xii–xiii). As they were well aware of the similarities between Muslim and Jewish cuisine, the distinction was maintained by considering Jewish food to be purer than Muslim food.⁵ Jews often employed Muslim maids, but would not want them to handle their food because they considered them impure. Moreover, they maintained an even stricter religious/moral prohibition on intermarriage than the Christians (*ibid.*, pp. 36, 51). The consumption of certain foods was thus integral to the way Muslims distinguished themselves, or were distinguished, from Christian and Jewish groups, even though at times other distinctions were more important. The ethnic divide between Arabs and Berbers, so often used by the French in their efforts to 'divide and rule', seems to have been expressed less in food politics. Berbers and Arabs are united in their Islamic religion, and thus bound by the same dietary rules *vis-à-vis* the Christian and Jewish colonists. Not food, but language and gender are the most effective identity markers in this context.

Through food the different groups were involved in a process of self-identification and of distinction from others. Access to food and the price paid played a crucial role in Algerian resistance to the French, in the peasant revolts and later the struggle for independence. The choice of foods gave them a symbolic means to present themselves, to show the way they saw themselves and wanted to be seen by others. Through their food, and by implication their religious laws, Algerians challenged the French claim to cultural superiority. Identity however, is not only a way of seeing and being seen, but also a way of being or doing. Identity is expressed not only by food preferences, but also produced in the daily rhythms of preparation and consumption. Notions of self are embodied in the practices of cleaning, milling, cooking, eating. The individual and collective self is constructed in the straining of the working body, the time allotment during the day, the training of children to eat properly, the seating arrangements at table, or the movements of putting food to the mouth. A life world is constructed through the preparation of food. Following Foucault, one could call these 'technologies of self'. But it is a self that is clearly gendered: Algerian men are supposed to be the food growers and providers, albeit with much help from women, and women nearly exclusively prepare the meal. Up until independence, the preparation of bread moved from Algerian homes to French bakeries, and from female to male hands. How did this process come about, and what did it mean for individual and collective identities?

Changes in Production Processes and the Gendered Division of Labour

The traditional preparation of bread was a woman's affair, as can still be seen occasionally in the villages. Some peasant women still grind their own flour with a heavy handmill of two round halves of stone. They set it between their legs on the floor, while they rhythmically turn the wooden stick in the upper half counter-clockwise with the right hand, and deftly put the grains in the hole in the middle with the left-hand. They change hands when they get tired. The flour is collected on a goatskin or a piece of cloth. It is then sieved through three different sieves. The coarser granules are ground again or set aside for couscous, the finest flour is used for bread. An expert housewife in the oasis of Tabelbala could thus grind about 3 kg of flour in an hour and a half (Champault, 1969, p.71). The women of the Aures considered it a long and arduous task (Gaudry, 1928, p. 152). Milling is strictly women's work. When assistance is needed with very large handmills, other women help. Not only the milling and sieving, but also the kneading of the dough is considered long and hard work. It needs the muscles of a strong woman and many a mother has looked forward to the time that her daughter or daughter-in-law could take over this task. It needs expertise, attention, and patience in waiting for the dough to rise. It needs regularity because flour becomes mouldy and yeast dies easily, so one is forced to bake bread at regular intervals (Bruneton, 1975, p. 276). The time and energy spent on bread-making structured the daily rhythm of life. Under specific circumstances, men could take over part of the food preparation, such as grilling the lamb during a saint's festival, but they would never take over the preparation of bread.

These work movements and rhythms were an important part of women's *habitus*. So only a complex of reasons could make it disappear from the home. First, women tried to get rid of the milling, because it consumed energy and time. Gaudry noted for the Aurès in the 1920s, that all families still owned a handmill, but that rich families and temporary nomadic families preferred to use the watermill to grind their grain. Women found the milling of grain tiresome and painful for their shoulders, and the handmill was considered too heavy to take on nomadic trips unless one was forced to do so by poverty (Gaudry, 1928, p. 152). Moreover, milling was less status-enhancing than other tasks. When a woman is skilled in milling it may boost her self-esteem and the respect she gets from her family. But her skill is not visible to outsiders and thus of little use to her social standing and reputation as an able and skilled housewife. In negotiating with the husband about this task and when they wanted him to buy flour, women could find support from religious law and certain urban traditions. Some scholars of the Mâlikî law school predominant in Algeria, and of the Abâdî school followed in the Algerian Mزاب,

stipulated that a wife could not be obliged to grind corn and that her husband was to supply her with flour and not grain (Rodinson, 1979, p. 1064).

Women's complaints about this heavy and painful task were seldom sufficient reason to make the man buy milled flour when the family's financial situation allowed for it. Economic considerations were more important, for instance that weaving or working on the land was more necessary or could generate income which milling could not. External pressure was also great. Industrially ground wheat was a widely traded commodity. The French colonial economy and military domination encouraged by economic injections and by dumping products on the market, meant that people started to buy things formerly thought unnecessary. Algerians involved in the French military were offered the opportunity to buy cheap monthly stocks of flour. Not all women welcomed this change. A few argued that a house without milling songs was a dead house, that the fine wheat needed for good couscous was not available at the market, or that with their own mill they could make the semolina to their taste while the store only sold one uniform type of semolina (Champault, 1969, p. 71). In the 1970s, some women in the village told me that they continued to grind their own wheat because they or their husband preferred it to mechanically ground wheat, as it tasted much better and one could make it exactly to one's taste. They took pride in their skills, and laughed at my clumsy participatory efforts. But only the poorest women used this skill as a cultural strategy of gender identity; for most peasants and all urban families the heavy mill stones had become a sign of poverty.

Gradually, not only the milling, but also the kneading and baking, was taken over from the women. In towns and larger villages, the baking was already done outside the home in communal ovens, to which families brought their trays of breads and sweets. The oven-keeper was paid in kind, and what he did not consume himself was sold to bachelors or travellers. He was not a baker who made and sold bread himself. This left kneading as the last domestic task. Pellat writes: 'Until recently, in the Maghrib at least, it was considered dishonourable to buy one's bread outside, and the kneading of the dough, an essentially feminine occupation, was the duty of the mistress of the house or of a servant' (Pellat, 1986, p. 41). But here too, feminine pride lost out against female fatigue and cost effectiveness. Buying prepared food in order to reduce the work done domestically was not an uncommon phenomenon in North Africa. Early European visitors to Cairo spoke of thousands of cooks in the streets, 'the "Saracens" seldom doing any cooking' (Rodinson, 1979, p. 1064). In Algeria it never reached this level, but it was not uncommon. Due to the French, bread finally went the way of other prepared food. When French electric mills and mechanised bakeries were installed, there was little competition from Arabic male millers or bakers as these were practically non-existent. No price politics were needed to oust them. Any resistance of the population against the price of wheat had been violently repressed from the

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Figure 11.6 Bringing home made breads and pastry to the communal oven. Hârûn, Ahmad (n.d. probably 1980) *Zawâhir 2, Apparences* Alger: SNED, p.3. Algerian cartoons, like Arabic texts, have to be read from right to left.

beginning of the colonisation period. The colonists predominated in both cereal production and the processing and distribution of grain. An increasing part of the cereals needed for consumption was imported, mainly from France and mainly in a processed form. When women gave up making their own bread, families also gave up eating Arab bread. The mechanically produced and publicly sold bread was French bread. After independence, wheat politics between Algeria and France, based on imports paid for by gas revenues, continued to be an important issue.

The Limitations of Bread as Identity Marker

In studies on Algerian identity formation, not food but religion is considered the main identity marker. Especially Islamic movements are seen to constitute an assertion of a social and political identity that is threatened by the French colonial system or by Western imperialism (Deeb, 1997, p. 113). When asked which foods are typically Algerian, grilled lamb or couscous are much more likely to be named as typically Algerian than bread. The most basic item of the Algerian meal is not considered worthy of attention, description, or analysis in terms of identity. What limitations does bread have as identity marker, compared to other foods? Why did couscous survive French cultural domination and Arab bread not?

Part of the answer must be sought in the hierarchy of foods. Bread, despite its being basic, blessed by God, and symbolic of all food, is not the most prestigious food. It is usually considered complementary to the main dish, even if that dish is meagre and seems to do little more than make the bread tastier. Bread is food by which to stay alive, not to show off with. To offer only bread to a guest, would be a sign of poverty of the host and an insult towards the guest. Plain bread is given only to beggars. Bread is the vehicle on which the more prestigious foods like meat, almonds, vegetables, eggs, or honey, are brought to the mouth. Well-educated

guests will show off their self-restraint and civility by waiting to take immediately and copiously from the best foods, and eating bread first to weaken their appetite. Shortage of bread at the table would be an equally large insult. Bread has just to be there. Bread should never be commented upon or praised, as this would be a disgrace to the host, who will see it as a sign that the main dish deserves no praise. The national dish Algerians take pride in is grilled lamb, whole or on skewers, or stewed lamb on top of couscous. Bacon argues that humans in general seem to prefer meat first, then tuberous roots, and only lastly grain. Grains are not the preferred food, nor do they provide the best diet (Bacon, 1990, p. 42). It is a recurrent pattern in many cultures that social position is measured in terms of 'how much' and 'how often' meat is eaten (Orlove, 1994, p. 133). For Algerians too, meat is the most important status symbol. In North Africa, wealth is expressed by meat, and poverty is measured by the extent to which one lives on dry bread.

Secondly, Algeria's increasing dependency on French wheat and French technology combined with the religious objection to French meat, explains why there was less hesitation in forsaking one's identity by consuming French bread than by consuming French meat. The dependency on imported French wheat continued after independence. In 1985, wheat imports in Algeria amounted to 2 million tons, supplementing a home production of 3 million tons of cereals (an extremely good year, as the year before the production had been only 1.5 million tons). France exported in that same year 60 per cent of its total cereal production of 28.7 million tons, and part of this went to Algeria (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, 1986, pp. 29–37).

That couscous survived the French cultural domination while Arab bread did not, can be explained as follows. The status of couscous as national dish has less to do with the grain itself, than with its 'face', the meat, vegetables and nuts on top. Its higher value is derived from being an inseparable carrier of meat and vegetable stews. The preparation of couscous is time-consuming, but somewhat less heavy and less time-restricted than that of bread. Couscous granules are made by stirring and rolling freshly ground grain sprinkled with salt water in a large round plate. Ferchiou argues that the process of rolling and drying couscous is a way of preserving grain, as starch accumulates around the larger and harder particles of bran and germ during the process, and thus, when dried, seals off the most perishable part of the grain from the air. The granules thus formed can be stored for months or years without staling (Ferchiou, 1978, pp. 183–5; Perry, 1990, p. 176). The most laborious part can thus be done a long time in advance. When families started to buy milled flour for bread, they also started to buy crushed wheat for couscous. The actual cooking of couscous, by steaming and rolling the granules, takes time, but is done more quickly than making bread and is relatively light. When women want to reduce their workload, it is more effective to give up the heavier, longer and less status-enhancing task of bread-making than that of cooking couscous.

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Figure 11.7 Colonial postcard of servant preparing couscous in an urban household

On the basis of the above, it can be argued that processes of distinction and identity formation are relevant but not in themselves adequate factors to understand why the production of bread and consumption of bread changed as it did in Algeria. There are other economic and social processes at work, such as the mechanisation and externalisation of (previously) domestic labour which have an impetus of their own and which can overrule the generally felt need to differentiate from the colonists or from each other.

Conclusion

This analysis of certain foods as indicators of social difference and superiority shows two things: first that particular foods can anchor the identity, the sense of collective self of groups and help them to differentiate themselves from other groups. Pure meats, ritually slaughtered and non-porcine, mark the boundedness of the Muslims and the Jews, and unambiguously differentiate them from the Christians. Wine on the other hand, marked the French. It was the French colonists who made Algeria into a wine-exporting country. When after independence this same wine became Algerian, France promptly closed its borders to it. France wanted only French wine.

Secondly, this analysis makes clear that not all foods are acknowledged and retained as equally symbolic of otherness. Some foods have a less fixed meaning and can be used to claim social mobility, to change identity. Some foods are more ambiguous than others. Rather than marking the identity of a bounded, closed group, they can be used to express the aspiration to belong to the higher status group. Compared with wine and meat, bread is relatively unmarked and can be used ambiguously to express social mobility and identification with the dominant powers by choosing French bread while at the same time declassifying it by careless and wasteful handling, by considering it less healthy, and by preferring Arab bread for rituals. The political and economic elite would privately enjoy the '*cuvée du président*', but this did not make wine acceptable as a marker of ascendancy. For the majority of Algerian Muslims it is not worthy of emulation, as it is a symbol of lewdness and lack of self-control.

The unmarkedness of bread, which favoured its change of identity from Arab to French, does not in itself explain the changes in production, form and consumption. Social processes other than distinction or national identification processes, were responsible for that, such as the mechanisation and externalisation of (previously) domestic labour. These had an impetus of their own which overruled the generally felt need to differentiate from the French colonists. French bread is decreasingly regarded as French bread, but appropriated and integrated into Algerian culture, it becomes *khubz*.

Notes

1. The religious value of bread is even more pronounced in the two other religions 'of the book': Christianity and Judaism. In Christianity the daily bread prayed for in The Lord's Prayer stands for all food. Moreover, bread represents the

body of Christ. All three religions know the Arabic word *manna*, meaning bread/heavenly food/God's gift. The Arabic verb *manna* means to bestow blessings. The Christian wafer is unleavened, as is the ritual bread for the Jewish Passover. In both cases, unleavened bread has become the symbol of all food. Bacon argues that the symbolic bread was unleavened because at that time of the year (early spring), unripe wheat had to be used to make bread. 'Flour made from unripe wheat will not rise when mixed with yeast. This is how the flatbreads of Scandinavia originated' (1990, p. 43). I would suggest that it should rather be related to migration and the nomadic origin of unleavened, round flat breads. Risen dough needs time, patience and a regular rhythm of life not always available to people on the move.

2. This is one of the numerous proverbs in Arabic in which bread is used as a metaphor. It may signify life in its most basic form, as in 'Roses are scented but bread keeps us alive', or 'All roads lead to the mill'. Or it signifies life as a social relation as in 'Bread given to an honorable man is a loan, bread given to dishonorable men is alms' or 'A man's bread is a debt he owes to others'. It is the first requirement for social ascension: 'No bread, no power' (Lunde & Wintle, 1984, pp. 45, 50, 109).
3. The importance of wine as an element of French identity, as well as the Muslim reaction to this, came to the fore in the media covering the visit of President Mohammad Khatami of Iran to Paris (27–29 October 1999). The state banquet was cancelled because the French insisted on serving wine while the Iranians refused to sit down at a table where wine was served.
4. Algerian Muslims are mostly Sunnites, and less familiar with the veneration of sacrificial blood connected among the Shi'ites with the commemoration of Ali's martyrdom. For North Africa, the sacrificial consumption of blood has only occasionally been mentioned in relation to Sufi rituals. Recently, the idiom of slaughtering (*dhabaha*) marks other boundaries: that between Islamists and the state. It is used by the Fighters for God to justify their killing of political opponents, and by the government to denounce the bestial killing of innocent civilians.
5. Elsewhere in the Middle East Jews do not like to dine with Muslims because of the Muslim culinary speciality of cooking lamb in milk or yoghurt, a combination forbidden by Jewish dietary laws. This food habit was not common in Algeria.

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Index

- abstinence of alcohol 120
acquarello 121
agriculture
 in Algeria 202
 in 1930s Norway 148, 150
alcohol 13
 in late medieval and early modern Europe 119–22
 consumption by the elderly 124–32
 medical opinions on consumption by the elderly 127–8
 and sexual activity 128–30
 sociability of drinking 130–2
 see also specific types of alcohol
ale 120, 121, 126
alehouses 130–1
Algeria 14–15, 195–6
 agricultural production 202
 bread 14–15, 16–17, 196–200, 203–7, 209–13
 colonisation 200–2
 identity markers 211–13
 food imports 212
 meat 207–8, 212
 religion 207–8
 wine 168, 201–2, 207–8
 women 209–11
alimentary shame 29
Almagro 40–2
American Revolution, food disturbances 185–6
annacquato 121
Annales historians 165, 174
appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC) 164
appellations d'origine 164, 165–8
aristocracy in early nineteenth century Spain 37–61
Artusi, Pellegrino 83
baking powder sales in post-war Germany 73–4
Barthes, Roland 10, 18
battle of grain, Italy 84, 85
beer 120, 121
 see also alcohol
Bekleidungsstelle 79
Belgium, food poisoning 7, 19
Belle Epoque 164
black market in post-war Germany 64–5
Board of Trade inquiry into cost of living 110, 112
Boston Tea Party 185–6
Bourdieu, Pierre 9
boycotts 182, 184, 186, 187
Braudel, Fernand 10
bread
 and construction of identity 202
 French Algeria 14–15, 16–17, 196–200, 203–7, 209–13
 in interwar Italian peasant diet 12, 14, 83, 85, 88
 limitations as identity marker 211–13
 as metaphor 205, 215
 post-war Germany 66, 73
 religious value 214–15
 riots 182–3
 in Spanish aristocratic diet 44–5
breakfast, Oslo 148, 152, 157–8, 159
Brillat-Savarin, Jean-Anthelme 18
butter, absence in Spanish cuisine 47, 58–9
camping in post-war Germany 69
canned foods in post-war Germany 74–5
CARE 64, 79
carnival rituals 31
Casa de Cervera 37–61
caste system 29, 32
champagne, regional delimitation 14, 166–73, 174
chocolate
 in Spanish aristocratic diet 46–7, 55, 58
 in West German diet 67

Index

- church ale 130
cider 120, 121, 126
class 16, 56
class identity 12, 14, 54–5
Coca-Cola 14, 189
coffee
 Italy 84
 nineteenth-century France 110
 post-war Germany 66–7, 68
cognac 164
commensality 12, 17, 24–5
 definition 24
 domestic 25–7
 everyday 27–8
 exceptional 27–8
 and identity 31
 institutional 25–7
 segregative 28–30
 transgressive 30–1
conviviality 24
Cooperative for American Remittances to
 Europe 64, 79
corody 124–5
couscous 211, 212, 213
currency reform in post-war Germany 65–6
- Dahrendorf, Ralf 63
Damsleth, Harald 142
D' Avenel, Georges 99
Det Norske Arbeiderpartiet 151
Die kluge Hausfrau 67–9, 70, 71–2, 76–8, 79
dieting in post-war Germany 76–8
dom Pérignon 15, 170
Douglas, Mary 7, 9
drunkenness 121–2
- eggs in Spanish aristocratic diet 44
Einrichtungswelle 79
elderly people
 in late medieval and early modern Europe
 122–4
 alcohol consumption 124–32
 medical opinions on alcohol consumption
 127–8
England, sugar consumption 100
entrave 182
Escoffier, Auguste 166, 174
ethnicity 16
- etiquette and commensality 27
exclusion 12
- family group commensality 25–6
Fascist propaganda and food consumption in
 Italy 85–90, 95
fast food in post-war Germany 68, 69
feast meals 27
 in inter-war Italy 83
 in post-war Germany 67, 73, 77
femininity 17
Figaro, Le 164, 173
First World War and Italy 89
fish
 in Italy 83, 91–2
 in Spanish aristocratic diet 45–6, 58
Fischler, Claude 8, 9
Flandrin, Jean-Louis 10, 19, 121
food
 classification of sugar in France 104
 functional aspects 9
 as a gift 32
 and identification 7–10
 and identity 3–5, 7–10, 15, 17, 19, 180
 as identity marker 4, 211
 national stereotyping 4, 18, 82
 significance in post-war Germany 74–5
food anthropology 7
food disturbance/protest *see* food riots
food policy in inter-war Italy 86–7
food prices
 and Spanish aristocratic diet 45, 55
 in West Germany 64–5
food riots 14, 17, 102–3, 179–82
 cultural meanings of food 187–90
 definition 181
 historiography 182–7
 sugar 102, 113
foodies 7
Foucault, Michel 6
France
 colonisation of Algeria 200–2
 food disturbances 190
 historical food studies 10
 influence on Algerian bread and wine
 195–218
 nineteenth-century sugar consumption
 99–118

Index

- regional agricultural specialities 165–8
- role of wine and champagne in making a national identity 163–77
- segregative commensality 30
- Frank, Dana 184, 186
- Fresswelle* 73, 79
- fruit
 - post-war Germany 66
 - in Spanish aristocratic diet 50, 59
- Funk, Casimir 155, 159
- gender 16, 17
 - and Algerian bread production 209–11
 - and food riots 183–4, 185
- Gerber baby food 180
- gluttony 127
- Goody, Jack 7
- Grignon, Claude 7, 10
- Gruyère 166
- Guerre des Deux Haricots* 163–4, 169–72
- Halbwachs, Maurice 99
- healthy diet in post-war Germany 76–8
- herbs in Spanish aristocratic diet 50–1
- Heyman, Paula 184, 187
- hierarchisation and segregative commensality 29
- historical food studies
 - cultural 10–11
 - France 10
 - and identity 10–12
- Holst, Axel 149
- honey consumption in France 113
- honour 12
- housewife in post-war Germany 68, 74–5
- hunger
 - in early nineteenth-century Spain 60
 - in French Algeria 200
 - in inter-war Italy 83–4
 - in post-war Italy 90–2
- identification 6–7
 - and food 7–10
- identity
 - class 12, 14, 54–5
 - collective 180
 - and commensality 31
 - concept of 5–6
 - construction through bread and wine 202
 - crisis 6
 - and food 3–5, 7–10, 15, 17, 19, 180
 - formation 12, 14–15, 17
 - and historical food studies 10–12
 - and ideology 19
 - multiple 15–16
 - national 4, 14, 18, 163–77
 - primary/secondary 6
 - and ritual meals 204–5
- ideology and identity 19
- inclusion 12
- incorporation principle 8, 9
- international cuisine in post-war Germany 69–70
- Italy
 - bread consumption 12, 14, 85, 88
 - inter-war ‘frugal’ diet 82–90
 - post-war diet 90–4
 - working-class diet in first half of twentieth century 81–97
- jelly sales in post-war Germany 73–4
- Kaplan, Temma 183–4
- labour strikes 183
- La Mancha, diet of nobility in early nineteenth century 12, 37–61
- laws on demarcation of wine regions 164–8
- Le Roy Ladurie, Emmanuel 121
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude 7, 9, 10
- lunch counter sit-ins 189
- macdonaldisation* 4
- Magnum* 69–70
- maintenance agreements 125
- Manzoni, Alessandro 23
- margarine in post-war Germany 68
- market riot 182
- masculinity 17
- mead 120, 121, 126
- meals
 - garnishing in post-war Germany 68, 72
 - rhythm 28
- meat
 - Algeria 207–8, 212
 - consumption in Italy 81, 83, 87–8, 91, 93

Index

- kosher, boycott 184, 187
 - red 3, 18
 - riots 187
 - in Spanish aristocratic diet 42–4, 57–8, 59
- Mediterranean diet 54, 81, 94
- Mehmet efendi 5
- Mennell, Stephen 7, 10
- mezzo vino* 121
- milk
 - in Norway 151, 158
 - in Spanish aristocratic diet 51
- milling 209–10
- Mintz, Sydney 100
- Montanari, Massimo 11
- moral economy 182–3, 184, 187

- national identity 14, 18, 163–77
- National Nutrition Exhibition, Oslo 141–61
 - architecture 143
 - iconography 142, 144
- nationalism
 - and food riots 184–6
 - and protectionist legislation 164–5
- Neumann, Gerhard 11
- nobility in early nineteenth century Spain 37–61
- Norway
 - agriculture in the 1930s 150
 - diet 14
 - modernity in the 1930s 148–52
 - National Nutrition Exhibition 141–61

- olive oil in Spanish aristocratic diet 49–50, 57
- Oslo, National Nutrition Exhibition 141–61
- Oslo breakfast 148, 152, 157–8, 159

- partying in post-war Germany 70–1
- pasta 91
- pellagra 83
- pensions 124–5
- Pérignon, Dom Pierre 170
- pig-killing in early nineteenth century Spain 52
- piquette* 121
- polenta 83
- poor relief, Norway 148–9
- potatoes
 - in inter-war Italy 83, 87, 89
 - in Spanish aristocratic diet 48–9, 59

- Potter, David 188–9
- preserved foods in post-war Germany 74–5
- price riot 182
- protectionism in French agriculture and viticulture 163–77
- protein deficiency in Italian peasant diet 82

- rationing in post-war Germany 65
- region 16
- Reisewelle* 79
- religion 16
 - Algeria 207–8
 - and bread 214–15
 - and food consumption 5, 43, 45–6, 51–2, 54
- restaurants 30
- ritual meals and identity 204–5
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 4

- Schiotz, Carl 152, 157
- seasonal food consumption 54–5
- Second World War, effect on Italian diet 89–90
- servants in early nineteenth century Spain 52–3, 60
- sexual activity and alcohol 128–30
- small ale 121
- society, divisions of 24–5
- Spanish nobility in early nineteenth century 37–61
 - consumption of own products 38
 - household accounts 39, 48
 - lifestyle 42
 - religion 54
 - servants 52–3
- spices in Spanish aristocratic diet 50–1, 59
- standards of living 17–18
- Stockholm Exhibition (1930) 143, 146–7
- sugar 13, 17
 - classifying 104–7
 - consumption in England 100
 - consumption in Italy 84, 93
 - consumption in nineteenth-century France 99–118
 - riots 102, 113
 - uses 102–4
- Sunday lunch 27
- Italy 91

Index

- post-war Germany 66–7
- Syndicat du Commerce des Vins de Champagne 166
- taboos 8, 11, 23
- taverns 130–1
- taxation populaire* 182
- tea, Boston Tea Party 185–6
- terroir* 164, 172, 173
- Teuteberg, Hans-Jürgen 11, 100
- Thompson, Edward 10, 183, 187
- United States, food disturbances 186–7, 187–90
- upbringing and commensality 26
- vegetables
 - Italian consumption 89, 91
 - in Spanish aristocratic diet 47–9
- vegetarianism 3, 4
- vitamins
 - overemphasis on 157
 - research and importance in 1930s Norway 149–50, 152–7, 159
- War of the Two Beans 163–4, 169–72
- Warde, Alan 9, 19
- water purchase by Spanish nobility 51
- Weimar Republic 63
- West Germany, post-war
 - black market 64–5
 - cost of living 65
 - currency reform 65–6
 - food consumption 63–80
 - food supply and shortages 64–6
 - whisky, post-war Germany 70
- widows
 - maintenance agreements for 125
 - sexual appetites 129
 - as tavern-keepers 130–1
- Wiegelmann, Günther 100
- Wierlacher, Alois 11
- Wildt, Michael 12, 19
- wine
 - Algeria 168, 201–2, 207–8
 - benefits to the elderly 127–8
 - and construction of identity 202
 - English 120
 - fraud by French producers 167
 - and French identity 207, 215
 - and the making of French identity in the belle époque 163–77
 - medieval France 120–1
 - post-war Germany 70
 - regional appellations 166–8
 - rejuvenating qualities 125–6
 - in Spanish aristocratic diet 51, 59
 - strength 121
 - see also* alcohol
- women
 - Algeria 209–11
 - participation in food riots 183–4, 185
- workplace commensality 26