

# THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF FOOD AND EATING

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**Key Words** commensality, meals, cooking, cuisine, food insecurity

■ **Abstract** The study of food and eating has a long history in anthropology, beginning in the nineteenth century with Garrick Mallery and William Robertson Smith. This review notes landmark studies prior to the 1980s, sketching the history of the subfield. We concentrate primarily, however, on works published after 1984. We contend that the study of food and eating is important both for its own sake since food is utterly essential to human existence (and often insufficiently available) and because the subfield has proved valuable for debating and advancing anthropological theory and research methods. Food studies have illuminated broad societal processes such as political-economic value-creation, symbolic value-creation, and the social construction of memory. Such studies have also proved an important arena for debating the relative merits of cultural and historical materialism vs. structuralist or symbolic explanations for human behavior, and for refining our understanding of variation in informants' responses to ethnographic questions. Seven subsections examine classic food ethnographies: single commodities and substances; food and social change; food insecurity; eating and ritual; eating and identities; and instructional materials. The richest, most extensive anthropological work among these subtopics has focused on food insecurity, eating and ritual, and eating and identities. For topics whose anthropological coverage has not been extensive (e.g., book-length studies of single commodities, or works on the industrialization of food systems), useful publications from sister disciplines—primarily sociology and history—are discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

Writing more than twenty years ago, Professor Joseph Epstein tells us:

[T]en years ago I should have said that any fuss about food was too great, but I grow older and food has become more important to me. . . . [J]udging from the space given to it in the media, the great number of cookbooks and restaurant guides published annually, the conversations of friends—it is very nearly topic number one. Restaurants today are talked about with the kind of excitement that ten years ago was expended on movies. Kitchen technology—blenders,

grinders, vegetable steamers, microwave ovens, and the rest—arouses something akin to the interest once reserved for cars. . . . The time may be exactly right to hit the best-seller lists with a killer who disposes of his victims in a Cuisinart (Aristides 1978, pp. 157–58).

But what Professor Epstein was witnessing turned out to be only the first swallow, so to speak. Since then, food has become even more important to everybody, anthropologists included.

Of course anthropologists have been interested in food for a long time. Garrick Mallery's paper, "Manners and meals" (1888), appeared in Volume 1, No. 3, of the *American Anthropologist*. William Robertson Smith's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889) contains an important chapter on food. Frank Hamilton Cushing's little monograph on Zuni breadstuffs (1920) and Franz Boas's exhaustive treatment of Kwakiutl salmon recipes (1921) are other examples of early work. (Though these last two seemed like mere fact collecting to some, Helen Codere's paper on Boas's salmon recipes (1957) showed just how much could be learned about social organization and hierarchy by carefully reading about how to cook a salmon.)

In a more recent era, Claude Lévi-Strauss (e.g., 1965) and, in his wake, Mary Douglas (1966) made important contributions to a structuralist vision of food and eating. But Jack Goody's book *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* (1982) seemed to mark a turning point. Since then, as the world that anthropologists chose to study became different, so has their work on food and eating. The anthropological study of food today has matured enough to serve as a vehicle for examining large and varied problems of theory and research methods.

In theory building, food systems have been used to illuminate broad societal processes such as political-economic value-creation (Mintz 1985), symbolic value-creation (Munn 1986), and the social construction of memory (Sutton 2001). Food studies have been a vital arena in which to debate the relative merits of cultural materialism vs. structuralist or symbolic explanations for human behavior (M. Harris 1998 [1985]; Simoons 1994, 1998; Gade 1999). In addition, food avoidance research has continued to refine theories about the relationship between cultural and biological evolution (Aunger 1994b).

Examinations of the relationships between food supplies and seasonal rituals of conflict (Dirks 1988), food supplies and the frequency of war (Ember & Ember 1994), and food resource periodicity and cooperativeness (Poggie 1995)—while by no means devoid of methodological problems—suggest the utility of the Human Relations Area Files for comparative cross-cultural research. The reasons for intracultural variation in informants' responses, and their implications for data interpretation, have been examined with reference both to hot-cold classifications of foods (Boster & Weller 1990) and to food avoidances (Aunger 1994a). Food systems have also been used to examine tensions between elicited taxonomies and the categories people use in everyday life (Nichter 1986, Wassmann 1993).

Our work here had to take into account nearly two decades of research since Messer's ARA review (1984). Serious coverage of the whole field was impractical.

We decided to use just seven headings to define our scope. This coverage omits many worthy sources, even within those headings: classic food ethnographies; single commodities and substances; food and social change; food insecurity; eating and ritual; eating and identities; and instructional materials. We had to neglect closely related topics, such as food in prehistory; biological aspects of eating (nutritional anthropology and food in medical anthropology); infant feeding and weaning (see Van Esterik in this volume); cannibalism (on kuru, see Lindenbaum 2001); and substances causing major psychoactive changes.

Except in our food insecurity section, we set aside works dealing only with food production and not with its consumption. On the one hand, the literature on agriculture in developing countries is extensive and requires separate review; on the other, the social science of food production in industrialized contexts is scant (Murcott 1999a). Our focus on works that postdate Messer's review of similar themes heavily favors anthropology, but unity of theme mattered more in some instances than did disciplinary boundaries.

In addition to the specific sources discussed below, scholars benefit from general reference works including theoretical analyses of social scientific approaches to eating (Murcott 1988, Wood 1995), literature reviews (Messer 1984), compilations of syllabi and bibliographies (Lieberman & Sorensen 1997; Dirks 2002), encyclopedias of food (Davidson 1999, Katz 2002, Kiple & Ornelas 2000), and general histories of food habits (e.g., Toussaint-Samat 1992, Flandrin & Montanari 1999; for surveys of the historical literature on specific European countries, see Teuteberg 1992). Journals oriented to the social life of food include: *Gastronomica*, *Petits Propos Culinaires*, *Food & Foodways*, and *Digest: An Interdisciplinary Study of Food and Foodways*; they are complemented by numerous journals in the subfield of nutritional anthropology (see Messer 1984, p. 207 for a partial listing). Internet sources on agriculture and food (e.g., Agricultural Network Information Center 2000, U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization 2001, U.S. Department of Agriculture 2001), which often yield far more information than first meets the eye, offer statistical data, details of policies and programs, bibliographies, and links to other websites. Among relevant conferences, the Oxford Symposia publish useful proceedings (see R. Harris 1996).

## CLASSIC ETHNOGRAPHIES

Comprehensive, anthropological monographs on food systems are lamentably rare. Audrey Richards's (1939) *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia* still remains the model for the field; she and an interdisciplinary team examined food production, preparation, exchange, preferences, symbolism, consumption, and nutritional consequences. Moore & Vaughan have restudied food systems in the region where Richards worked (1994), combining history with ethnography in an analysis that is both broad and richly detailed—a worthy successor to Richards's work. Taken as a pair, Ikpe's history of food systems in Nigeria (1994) and Anigbo's ethnography of commensality among the Igbo (1987) provide similar breadth.

Trankell's culinary ethnography of the Thai Yong of Thailand (1995) lacks historical depth, yet still combines examination of food production, local categorization, preparation, gender dynamics, consumption patterns, and rituals.

More specifically focused ethnographies include: Weismantel's examination of gender and political economy as expressed through food in the Ecuadorian Andes (1988); Kahn's analysis of food, gender identities, and social values in Papua New Guinea (1986); Whitehead's study of gender hierarchy and food sharing rules, also in Papua New Guinea (2000); Mahias's work on culinary beliefs and practices among the Jains of Delhi (1985); Kanafani's finely textured study of the visual, olfactory, and gustatory aesthetics of food preparation and consumption in the United Arab Emirates (1983); and Sutton's extended meditation on how culinary memories help define the identities and social lives of Greeks living on the island of Kalymnos (2001).

These monographs are complemented by several collections of essays dealing with foodways in specific regions: Peru (Weston 1992), the United States (Brown & Mussell 1984, Humphrey & Humphrey 1988), Africa (Devisch et al. 1995; Froment et al. 1996), the Middle East (Zubaida & Tapper 1994), Britain (Murcott 1983, 1998), South Asia (Khare & Rao 1986), Oceania and Southeast Asia (Manderson 1986), and Oceania alone (Kahn & Sexton 1988, N. Pollock 1992). All except Pollock's book on Oceania are anthologies; all cover multiple topics, including food in regional history; food preparation, taboos, and preferences; food and identities; and culinary symbolism.

Scattered among a wide variety of social-scientific journals and anthologies dealing primarily with issues other than food are many valuable ethnographic essays on food systems; we cannot begin to mention them all. We should note, however, the debates among those who study hunter-gatherers over optimal foraging theory, a behavioral-ecological model which posits that people adopt food strategies maximizing their caloric intake per unit of time, with the caloric *costs* of those food strategies taken into account. The theory itself has been propounded (Kaplan & Hill 1985) and contested (Thomas 1992), as have its implications for the study of hunters' motivations for food-sharing (Hawkes 1991, Bliege Bird & Bird 1997, Wood & Hill 2000).

In-depth studies of food systems remind us of the pervasive role of food in human life. Next to breathing, eating is perhaps the most essential of all human activities, and one with which much of social life is entwined. It is hoped that more anthropologists will accord food the central place in their ethnographies that it occupies in human existence.

## SINGLE COMMODITIES AND SUBSTANCES

Anthropologists have been writing papers about single substances—food sources, plants, animals, and foods made from them—for a long time. Probably the first substantial work in English devoted to a single such theme was R. N. Salaman's *History and Social Influence of the Potato* (1949). His book dealt with the potato's

origins, domestication, worldwide diffusion, and political fate in European life. Since that time many other such books have appeared—on drugs hard and soft, sugar, rhubarb, salt, codfish, capsicums, etc. Many are histories, general or botanical, others economic; it is striking that so few are by anthropologists.

Such works generally incline toward treating the subject mostly in terms of itself; using it to illuminate broader processes; or developing the theme in specific relation to cuisine. Smith on the tomato (1994), Willard on saffron (2001), Jenkins on bananas (2000), and Kurlansky on salt (2002) focus principally on their subject; all make use of history. Anthropologists such as Warman on maize (1988), Ohnuki-Tierney on rice (1993), and Mintz on sucrose (1985) are historical in orientation but try to relate each subject to wider fields of explanation. Two books by anthropologists on a food animal, the guinea pig (Morales 1995, Archetti 1997 [1992]), are quite similar in content. Though perhaps less detailed ethnographically, Archetti's is theoretically richer. Both authors take globalization and the world market into account; both note the spread of the *cuy* as a food source outside the Andes; both treat the guinea pig as a device through which to discuss cultural and social change. Long-Solís's (1986) study of capsicum in Mexico comes early in the succession of such studies. Rare enough to merit mention is Malagón's edited volume on marzipan (1990), which includes anthropological contributions. S. Coe & M. Coe's study of chocolate (1996) successfully combines archaeology and ethnography.

The Quincentenary stimulated much interest in foods that travel. Viola & Margolis (1991), Foster & Cordell (1992), and Long (1996), among many others, produced rich collections on food and diffusion that included work by many anthropologists. The late Sophie Coe's fine book on New World cuisine (1994) also stands out. Though not linked to 1492, the volume edited by Plotnicov & Scaglione (1999) contains, among others, papers on New World capsicums, cassava, the potato and tomato, and sweet potatoes, as well as sugar and coffee, and it stresses plant diffusion.

Fiddes's (1991) approach to meat reopened a subject that had previously held the attention of Sahlins (1976), Ross (1980), and M. Harris (1998 [1985]), among others. Orlove (1997) eloquently addresses the issue of universal vs. contingent meanings for meat by looking at a food riot.

Anthropological articles on single substances are so copious that only a few can be noted here. Messer's nuanced study of potato use in Europe (1997) considers obstacles to and benefits of the spread and assimilation of new food items. Gade, a geographer, raises useful questions with his study of broad beans in Quebec (1994) about how foods gain a foothold in specific settings. Y. Lockwood & W. Lockwood (2000a) consider Finnish-American dairy foods in an Oxford food symposium dedicated entirely to milk; Bestor (1999, 2001) reveals the links of Tokyo's wholesale tuna market to the world outside.

Murcott (1999b) argues for a redefinition of the social construction of food by looking at the history of milk and poultry regulation/definition in the United Kingdom. Gade's examination (1999) of the absence of milking in the Andes

recalls Simoons's treatment of the fava bean and favism (1998)—cases of foods people eat sparingly, with unease, or not at all. Somewhat different is McIntosh (2000), who links a temporary decline in U.S. egg consumption to a food scare. Taking a longer historical view, Brandes (1992) looks at maize avoidance and fear of pellagra in Europe, while Leach (2001) explains how a good herb can acquire a bad reputation. Neither “taboo” nor “prohibition” covers these papers; each is a different view of the perception of food.

## FOOD AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The effects of broad societal changes on eating patterns, and vice versa, are of growing interest to ethnographers. In-depth food ethnographies that include discussion of social change are covered in our “Classic Ethnographies” section above. In addition, the relevant literature includes both general collections of essays (Harris & Ross 1987, Pelto & Vargas 1992, Macbeth 1997, Lentz 1999, Wu & Tan 2001, Cwiertka & Walraven 2002) and other research exploring the culinary effects of the Soviet collapse; other changes in intergroup relations within societies; mass production of foods; biotechnology; movements of peoples; increasing globalization of foods themselves; and war. These themes are dealt with in turn.

Ethnographic literature on post-Soviet dietary patterns is limited but promising. Çaglar addresses changes in the marketing of Turkish fast-food in Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall (Çaglar 1999), whereas Ziker discusses food sharing and the moral code of aboriginal peoples in post-Soviet Siberia (Ziker 1998). Chatwin explores extensively the transformation of foodways in the Republic of Georgia, detailing the social, political, and economic context (Chatwin 1997).

Other food shifts are associated with a variety of economic and political changes, such as male out-migration, interclass rivalry and imitation, and market integration. Lentz's edited collection of essays explores several such themes (Lentz 1999). Mayer similarly delineates how changing caste relations are reflected in Indian village foodways (Mayer 1996). Jing's edited volume explores how government policies and social transformations in China have affected dietary habits, particularly of children (2000). Historians, too, have examined how broad social processes have led to culinary change (Mennell 1985, Levenstein 1993), and conversely, how food processing problems, such as massive, natural food poisonings (Matossian 1989), may have fostered social change.

Anthropological work on how the industrialization of food production and distribution has affected dietary patterns is scant. Mintz pioneered in this area with a historical study of sugar production and consumption (Mintz 1985). Anthropologists have also explored the interplay between the requirements of capitalists and consumers in Trinidad's sweet drink industry (D. Miller 1997) and the reaction to industrialized consumption patterns among adherents of Italy's “slow food” movement (Leitch 2000). Historians, rural sociologists, and communications theorists have also taken up the challenge of studying dietary patterns under industrialized capitalism, examining the relationship between food industries and the U.S.

counterculture (Belasco 1989), contestation in the organic foods movement (Campbell & Liepins 2001), food industries and the incorporation of ethnic cuisines (Belasco 1987), the refinement of packaging to entice consumption (Hine 1995), the role of modern advertising and marketing in dietary change (Cwiertka 2000), and the “mad cow” crisis (Ratzan 1998; for an anthropological review of literature on this crisis, see Lindenbaum 2001).

The interactions among the technologies of food production and processing, the physical characteristics of new foods, and consumer responses to new foods are critical determinants of dietary change, as Leach illustrates with historical examples (Leach 1999). In the contemporary period, capitalized agriculture has produced genetically engineered foods, provoking consumer reactions—particularly in Europe—that sorely merit further social-scientific examination (Murcott 1999a, 2001). For histories of agricultural biotechnology’s social contexts, see Kloppenborg 1988 and Purdue 2000; for contrasting perspectives on the globalization of such technology, see Levidow 2001 and Buctuanon 2001.

Anthropologists have more commonly recognized peoples on the move—migrants, refugees, and colonizers—as agents of dietary change. Thus, Lockwood & Lockwood explore changes in the foodways of Detroit’s Arab community, where not only the foods of the larger society, but also the cuisines of different ethnic groups within the community have inspired dietary shifts (Lockwood & Lockwood 2000b). By contrast, Goody’s examination of Chinese migrant food focuses not on their diets, but rather on their influences on diets in the countries to which they move (Goody 1998; see also Çağlar 1999). Wilk examines the complex culinary reactions of Belizeans to colonialism, class differentiation, and modernity (Wilk 1999). Tackling colonialism from a different angle, Dennett & Connell and their commentators have stirred up debate over the effects of acculturation on the diets of aboriginal peoples (Dennett & Connell 1988).

Not only do peoples move across the globe, so also do foods (see D. Miller 1997, Long 1996, and our section “Single Commodities and Substances” above). Sobal provides a useful review of the globalization of food production and transport, drawing on the work of sociologists, political economists, demographers, and other theorists (Sobal 1999; see also McMichael 1995). Focusing by contrast on consumption, Tam explains how the eclectic, international eating style of the residents of Hong Kong helps them construct their paradoxically local identities (Tam 2001). Also studying Asia, Watson has produced a fine edited volume about the varied reactions to McDonald’s of consumers in five different societies (Watson 1997).

Finally, the role of war in dietary change must not be overlooked. The following section notes the relationship between war and food insecurity. War as an agent of dietary change has also been researched by anthropologists Vargas (with physician Casillas) (1992), Mintz (1996), and Du Bois (2001), and by food historians Cwiertka (2002), Bentley (1998), Tanner (1999), and Ikpe (1994), among others. In general, however, we argue that the role of war—and the roles of many kinds of social changes—has been relatively neglected in food studies. These are areas ripe for research.

## FOOD INSECURITY

Johan Pottier argues that anthropology is threatened not by “a crisis of representation, but by a problem of relevance” (1999, p. 7; emphasis in original). Anthropologists can move beyond sometimes sterile metatheoretical debates either by contributing cultural understanding to nutritional interventions (e.g., Cortes et al. 2001) or by addressing the aching, urgent problem of food insecurity (or both). Those interested in world hunger will find area-studies journals useful, along with the *IDS Bulletin*, *World Development*, *Development and Change*, the *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *Food Policy*, and *Disasters*, among many others.

Pottier has written a masterful, extended review of anthropological work on the problem of food insecurity (1999). He focuses on the social backgrounds behind food insecurity and the projects meant to alleviate it, richly exploring such varied topics as intrahousehold allocation of resources, gender inequality, peasants’ risk management, effects of the Green Revolution, rural class polarization, local agricultural knowledge and meanings, constraints on small food marketers, loss of genetic diversity, and effective famine intervention. Pottier repeatedly questions conventional wisdom, suggesting avenues for detailed research in specific locales: Are intrahousehold allocations actually skewed? Is gender-separated farming always in the best interests of women? To what extent have capitalistic relations of agriculture evolved? Has the introduction of modern, scientific crops actually reduced genetic diversity? When should local famine-relief initiatives be prioritized over state initiatives? And so on.

Pottier’s book is complemented by development analyst Stephen Devereux’s *Theories of Famine* (1993), which explores both the weaknesses and contributions of several major theories about the causes of famine (see also de Waal 1989, which offers an ethnographic critique of standard Western definitions of famine).

Studies dealing with malnutrition among older children and adults (for young children’s nutritional issues, see Van Esterik in this volume) identify a variety of reasons for food insecurity. Scheper-Hughes’s wrenching ethnography of hunger in northeast Brazil lays the blame squarely on political-economic inequality (1992). Other sources explore powerful links between hunger and war, or ethnic conflict (e.g., Macrae & Zwi 1994, Chatwin 1997, Messer et al. 1998, Ogden 2000, Ikpe 1994), noting that “at the close of the 20th century, greatly enhanced capacity to anticipate and address natural disasters means that serious [acute, mass] food emergencies are almost always due to violent conflict and other human actions” (Pinstrip-Anderson, quoted in Messer et al. 1998, p. v). Still other studies find that infectious epidemics can lead to food insecurity because the most economically active individuals fall ill and networks of social exchange break down (Mtika 2001)—or the converse, that severe food shortages can lead to overcrowding and unsanitary conditions, exposing vast numbers to death from infectious diseases (de Waal 1989).

Many anthropological works on food insecurity focus on Africa. Shipton provides a valuable review for the pre-1990 literature (Shipton 1990). Notable studies



have examined the difficulties in feeding African cities (Guyer 1987), African food systems in times of crisis (ecological and land tenure problems, coping mechanisms, and strategies for increasing food security—Huss-Ashmore & Katz 1989/1990), the effects of economic structural adjustment programs on African women farmers (Gladwin 1991; see also Ikpe 1994), and the value of symbolic analyses in understanding the dynamics of food insecurity (Devisch et al. 1995). Studies examining food insecurity and disease in Africa have already been noted (de Waal 1989, Mtika 2001).

More general collections of essays, covering not only Africa but also other regions, likewise address numerous topics, including food policy and development strategies (McMillan & Harlow 1991), indigenous responses to fluctuations in food supplies (including case studies in Afghanistan—de Garine & Harrison 1988), and the relationships of women farmers to agricultural commercialization (Spring 2000). Nutritional anthropologists have undertaken research on food insecurity in the United States (see Himmelgreen et al. 2000). Literature on the hotly debated issue of whether and when food is unequally distributed within households in South Asia (to the detriment of females) is ably reviewed by B. Miller (1997).

## EATING AND RITUAL

Ethnographers have found multiple entry points for the study of how humans connect food to rituals, symbols, and belief systems. Food is used to comment on the sacred and to reenact venerated stories (e.g., see the francophone research on Islamic ritual sacrifice—Brisebarre 1998, Bonte et al. 1999, Kanafani-Zahar 1999). In consecrated contexts, food “binds” people to their faiths through “powerful links between food and memory” (Feeley-Harnik 1995; see Sutton 2001). Sometimes the food itself is sacred through its association with supernatural beings and processes (Bloch 1985, Feeley-Harnik 1994); the research on Hinduism is particularly rich in this regard (Singer 1984, Khare 1992, Toomey 1994).

Not only do ritual meals connect participants to invisible beings (e.g., Brown 1995), but they also perform critical social functions. Eating in ritual contexts can reaffirm or transform relationships with visible others (Munn 1986, Murphy 1986, Buitelaar 1993, Feeley-Harnik 1994, Brown 1995)—even when participants in a ritual meal bring very different religious understandings to the event (Beatty 1999). Rituals and beliefs surrounding food can also powerfully reinforce religious and ethnic boundaries (see, e.g., Mahias 1985, Bahloul 1989, Fabre-Vassas 1997).

Among the fundamental questions scholars can ask in this area are how human beliefs and rituals delineate what counts as food, and conversely, how humans use food in delineating what counts as ritual or proper belief. Addressing the first question, geographer Frederick Simoons has produced extensive studies of food taboos (1994, 1998). Simoons argues (against cultural materialist interpretations, such as M. Harris 1987, Katz 1987) that belief systems and their attendant rituals are the causal factors behind food taboos. For example, he contests the view of Katz (1987) and others that the ban against fava bean consumption among the ancient

followers of Pythagoras can appropriately be invoked to support a “biocultural evolutionary” theory (Katz 1987, p. 134) of food choice. Rather than evolving as a response to any medical dangers of fava bean consumption, according to Simoons the ban on fava beans sprang from “powerful magico-religious motives” (1998, p. 215). In a related vein, Vialles’s structuralist ethnography of French slaughterhouses (1994) examines how ritual and beliefs work to transform taboo items (carcasses) into food (meat) (see also Whitehead 2000 for a cogent social-relations interpretation of taboos).

The second question—how people use the act of eating as a vehicle for ritual—includes the study of food etiquette (Cooper 1986) and how such etiquette is implemented to express and create spirituality. J. Anderson’s study of the religious dimensions of the Japanese tea ceremony (1991), and Curran’s study of bodily discipline in the food rituals of American nuns (1989) exemplify this approach.

The invocation of deeply held values and beliefs through ritual foods has been analyzed in a variety of settings. Feeley-Harnik details the profound—and in its era, shocking—transformation of biblical symbolism among early Israelite Christians, particularly in the celebration of the Eucharist (1994). Brandes examines the relationship between sugar and Mexican rituals for the Day of the Dead, questioning the extent of these rituals’ historical continuities with Aztec practices (1997). By contrast, Weismantel argues that Andean Indian practices of eating and drinking during religious fiestas do have indigenous roots, reflecting Inca beliefs about feasting as a way of nourishing the dead (1991; on food continuities and their transformations, see also Bahloul 1989, Khan 1994).

Ironically, the relationship between eating and the sacred also provides fodder for carnivalesque, ritualized anti-ritual. Kugelmass’s essay on an ethnically Jewish restaurant in Manhattan that intentionally subverts the Jewish dietary laws, to comic effect, offers a fascinating example of such a process (1990).

The humor in the restaurant Kugelmass describes depends on a rich symbolic context even as it pokes fun at it. But one can argue that sometimes food rituals are not laden with symbolic meaning. Charsley contends that to his British informants, wedding cakes symbolize little more than weddings themselves (1992). He adds that what little evolution there has been in the meaning of the cake has been driven by technical changes in the cake’s materiality.

Less extreme materialists have posited that primary functions of food rituals are material, even as symbolism surrounding them abounds. Following in the footsteps of Rappaport, more recent works have examined ritual as a mechanism for maintaining ecological balance in local environments and/or for redistributing food (M. Harris 1987, Voss 1987). Similarly, many scholars point out that food rituals and taboos that practitioners understand at least partly in symbolic terms often serve either to reinforce (Tapper & Tapper 1986, M. Harris 1987, Auger 1994b, Fabre-Vassas 1997, Whitehead 2000) or to question (Lindenbaum 1986) hierarchical power relations or access to material goods. Rituals and taboos can also create divisions of labor and economic niches—sometimes even to the benefit of groups despised because of their contamination with “polluted” foodstuffs (M. Harris 1987). In all such analyses, symbolism surrounding food is evaluated as

fundamentally in the service of ecological, nutritive, or political-economic ends. Such approaches can contrast with the view that meaning is a powerful human need in and of itself (Giobellina Brumana 1988)—an importance it shares with food, with which it is constantly intertwined.

## EATING AND IDENTITIES

Like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart. The works noted here deal with how food functions in social allocation, in terms of ethnicity, race, nationality, class, and (less precisely) individuality and gender. Caplan (1997, pp. 1–31) offers a useful introduction to this broad theme.

Ethnicity is born of acknowledged difference and works through contrast. Hence an ethnic cuisine is associated with a geographically and/or historically defined eating community (e.g., Lockwood & Lockwood 2000a). But ethnicity, like nationhood, is also imagined (Murcott 1996)—and associated cuisines may be imagined, too. Once imagined, such cuisines provide added concreteness to the idea of national or ethnic identity. Talking and writing about ethnic or national food can then add to a cuisine's conceptual solidity and coherence. Thus, Ferguson (1998) uses Bourdieu's "cultural field" to claim that discourse really defined French cuisine. This argument fits well, as does Cwiertka's "metacuisine" (1999), with Trubek's study (2000) of how French cuisine was created, and it brings to mind Appadurai's classic paper (1988) on how to create a national cuisine; Pilcher (1998) provides a fine example of how it happens.

Gender does not differ from these other devices of social allocation: its relationship to food and eating is at least as real as food's relationship to the construction of nationhood, ethnicity, and race. Complicating these other distinctions is the part played by class or social position. Weismantel (1989) provides an excellent case in which nationality, ethnicity, class, and gender all intermesh in food habits.

James (1994) counterposes local identity to globalization, suggesting how the global may actually reestablish the local, rather than supplant it. Tuchman & Levine (1993) analyze the urban U.S. Jewish love affair with Chinese food, throwing light on both groups. Two rare little volumes on Vietnamese food and identity (Poulain 1997, Vol. I & II) provide a brief overview of that national cuisine. Kwon & Lee (1995) do a bit of the same for Korea. Finally, Noguchi (1994), Allison (1991), and Fieldhouse (1995, pp. 215–33) together provide a nice example of how lunch—and lunch boxes—can become part of national identity.

So swiftly has the literature on food and gender grown that it could properly merit an article of its own. Relevant work published since 1984 touches on intrafamilial food allocation, familial division of labor, obesity, ethnicity, fasting, sexual identity, and many other subjects. The Counihan-Kaplan anthology (1998) provides an introduction to gender as a basis of social allocation in foodways. Kahn (1986) made a valuable early contribution to our understanding of institutionalized gender differences and their connections to food (see also Munn 1986, Whitehead

2000); Counihan's collected papers (1999) are also useful. Julier's view that food and gender is a subject tackled primarily by female authors (Julier 1999) is convincing. Van Esterik (1999) discusses gender and the right to food; McIntosh & Zey (1989) discuss woman's role as gatekeeper. D. Pollock (1985), Jansen (1997), and Flynn (1999) provide three contrastive cases of the relation of food to sexual identity.

## INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

The torrent of new courses on the anthropology of food has been accompanied by a flood of books, syllabi, and films about food. We can document only some of those resources, beginning with works dealing with the foods of one (very populous) society that has been better researched than most others.

When the late K.C. Chang edited the volume *Food in China* (1977), it was a trend-setting achievement in two ways: a serious analytical and historical collection on Chinese cuisine by scholars, the first of its kind in English; and a joint effort, which helped to establish a precedent in food studies. Soon more Chinese food books, as opposed to cook books, appeared, by anthropologist Eugene Anderson (1988) and geographer Frederick Simoons (1991). Additional recent collections relevant to the study of Asian cuisine include: Jun Jing's *Feeding China's Little Emperors* (2000), David Wu & Tan Chee-beng's *Changing Chinese Foodways in Asia* (2001), and Katarzyna Cwiertka & Boudewijn Walraven's *Asian Food: The Global and the Local* (2002). A course on Chinese cuisine could make good use of these sources.

The multiplication of food anthologies without a regional focus is striking. Included are sociologist Anne Murcott's *The Sociology of Food and Eating* (1983); Barbara Harriss-White & Sir Raymond Hoffenberg's *Food* (1994); and Arien Mack's *Food: Nature and Culture* (1998). Volumes by anthropologists include Carola Lentz's *Changing Food Habits* (1999); Harris & Ross's (1987) rich anthology—24 contributions on food and evolution; Carole Counihan & Steven Kaplan's *Food and Gender* (1998); Leonard Plotnicov & Richard Scaglione's *Consequences of Cultivar Diffusion* (1999); and Marie-Claire Bataille-Benguigui & Françoise Cousin's *Cuisines: reflet des sociétés* (1996). Helen Macbeth's *Food Preferences and Taste* (1997) and Martin Schaffner's *Brot, brei und was dazugehört* (1992) are two other nonanthropological anthologies, the first mostly sociological, the second mostly historical; both contain some contributions by anthropologists. The same is true of Wiessner & Schiefenhövel's *Food and the Status Quest* (1996) and Hladik et al.'s *Tropical Forests, People and Food* (1993); both contain socially, culturally, and biologically oriented essays.

We asked a student of anthropology to examine the place of food in anthropology textbooks from the 1920s to the 1990s. Her findings suggest that food had become a much more concrete and important subject by the late 1950s. In post-1955 texts, one or more chapters might be devoted to food, especially food production, often in connection with subsistence levels, and some slant toward an evolutionary

treatment of society. By the 1980s, however, textbooks on the anthropology of food as such begin to appear (Farb & Armelagos 1980, MacClancy 1992). The textbook by Bryant et al. (1985) links nutrition and anthropology closely, as does the anthology edited by Sharman et al. (1991). The readers by Counihan & van Esterik (1997) and by Goodman et al. (2000) are entitled *Food and Culture*, and *Nutritional Anthropology*; their contents overlap.

Lieberman & Sorensen (1997) have edited an invaluable collection of syllabi for courses in nutritional anthropology, including a list of useful films, now available in PDF format from the Council on Nutritional Anthropology of the American Anthropological Association. The welter of food-related materials provides prospective course planners with ample material, but the courses themselves appear to be more clearly organized within nutritional anthropology than otherwise.

It appears, though, that sociologists have done even more than anthropologists. Among the many textbooks on the sociology of food, we should mention Mennell et al. (1992), Fieldhouse (1995), Whit (1995), McIntosh (1996), Fine et al. (1996), and Beardsworth & Keil (1997). It seems likely that there will be more textbooks and readers yet to come.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The staggering increase in the scale of food literature—inside and outside anthropology—makes bibliographic coverage challenging, a challenge compounded by the close intertwining of food and eating with so many other subjects. We posit that three major trends this last quarter century or so have influenced this growth: globalization; the general affluence of Western societies and their growing cosmopolitanism; and the inclusivist tendencies of U.S. society, which spurs even disciplines (and professions, such as journalism and business) without anthropology's strong inclusivist ethic to consider cross-cultural variations in foodways. A vast literature on food and globalization has appeared. Philosophers ponder whether they are exploiting the Third World by eating its foods. Culinary competence in the West declines at almost the same rate as discrimination in taste rises. Social scientists have examined the eating habits of Westerners in terms of ethnic group, region, religion, and much else—though relatively little, it seems, in terms of class (but see Roseberry 1996). Much remains to be done in exploring foodways in other areas of the world. In this setting, anthropologists are in a good position to make useful contributions to the development of policy in regard to health and nutrition, food inspection, the relation of food to specific cultures, world hunger, and other subjects. By and large, though, they have not taken full advantage of this opportunity.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although we are quite appreciative, we are unable to thank here all the colleagues who sent us suggestions, vitas, syllabi, and copies of their work. We do wish, however, to thank two students: Amy Delamaide and Jomo Smith.

The *Annual Review of Anthropology* is online at <http://anthro.annualreviews.org>

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