

Re-examining the Contested Good: Proceedings from a Postgraduate Workshop on Good Food

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Abstract: Following the 2017 postgraduate research workshop hosted by the SOAS Food Studies Centre, in collaboration with University of Warwick Food GRP, this article brings together nine research briefs written by various participants. Inspired by the workshop’s provocative theme, “What Is Good Food?”, each author explores how food categories are shaped and negotiated in different contexts and across scales. In this multi-authored article, the question of “good” food is first presented as contingent upon nutritional, economic, political, ritual, or moral conditions. Each author then reveals how globally defined notions of food’s goodness are often resisted on the ground by producers and consumers, beyond the notions of ethics or “alternative” food movements that have often been the emphasis of previous literature dealing with the topic of good food. Taken together, this article scrutinizes the effects of various hierarchies of power and invites readers to reassess why and how good food continues to be a contested category.

Keywords: “good” food, spatiality, morality, identity, power

As readers of *Gastronomica* know, “good” food means very different things to different people. The contested nature of the question “What is good food?” is well documented, and the debate might seem, to a large extent, saturated. Yet, this should not distract from the need to continue exploring this question, particularly from a diversity of contexts and disciplines.

Asking, in particular, *who* decides what good food is and how it is negotiated, both from a micro and macro perspective, is crucial.

We return to the concept of good food because the focus in many previous explorations of this theme was situated either in nutritional understandings of good, which conflated it with healthy, or in ethical understandings of good, such as “ethical consumption” or alternative, artisanal foods. This emphasis risks focusing attention solely on situations where the language of nutritional science or alternative food movements is used, thereby ignoring the many other ways in which food comes to be seen as good (Jung 2014). Much of the work presented here has to do with adjusting to new systems of food processing, changing demands on our time, and new versus old systems of power and class. In particular, we are interested in exploring how these impact the ways we experience food, and how those experiences may be contingent on myriad moral categories.

Each of our stories intersects in the re-examination of the contested nature of good food. Analyzing this concept in a broad variety of global contexts offers an insight into how “global” discourses (around concerns such as nutrition or obesity) interact with more situated concerns. These more emplaced considerations produce very different understandings of what might make a food good (or bad!). Rather than seeing this as a local/global or alternative/conventional dichotomy, we think the attention to good food affords a fascinating opportunity to pull apart and analyze the relationship between these different frames, which are interlinked and complex. In this context, our collection shows how some notions of good food are challenged and even resisted in response to what are perhaps too many and much too fluid ideas of “goodness.”

Especially in the last ten years, the question of what good food is and how notions of goodness are negotiated has occupied food scholars from a range of disciplinary perspectives. Possibly the most unifying feature of these perspectives is the focus on the multiple and often

competing moralities that are underlying creations and negotiations of understandings of good food (see e.g. Andersen 2011; Guthman 2008; Wilkerson 2016), emphasizing that a more single-minded focus on individual choice is limiting at best and discriminating at worst. It is thus not surprising that questions of what counts as good food are often tethered to debates about health and nutrition.

A recent special issue on Critical Nutrition published in this journal (Guthman 2014) debates whether classic nutritional science adequately defines good food, only to conclude that in a world where “expertise” is sought from a wide and contentious variety of sources, the only thing we can be sure of is that a confusing number of actors consider themselves authorities in this discourse. Rather than solving the problem of defining “healthy” or “nutritious” food, it is argued, this increased public, as well as lay and scholarly, interest may actually exacerbate the problem, reinforcing anxieties about what good and bad food is (see also Biltekoff 2013; Bobrow-Strain 2012). While Guthman (2014) proposes to defamiliarize nutrition to overcome this confusing cacophony, other food scholars suggest a return to food’s materiality, to treat food as food, embedded in sensory experiences of taste (e.g., Abbots 2014; Mol 2009).

Grasseni and Paxson (2014), in their proposal to reconceptualize the debate through the “reinvention of food,” go beyond morality, health, nutrition, and taste as markers of good food. The authors in their collection address how food is being rediscovered and renewed, giving new form and significance to food substances, senses, and practices, and propose an attention to issues of affordability, accessibility, and familiarity as equally important markers of good food. The food they describe is good not only in multifaceted and highly politicized ways: its goodness also emerges in relations between feeders and eaters, and is always embedded in specific contexts of production and consumption that partially determine choices. This shift in focus requires considering not only the political economy of a given

food and food system, but also acknowledging the multispecies “ecologies of production” (Paxson 2013) that any food is inevitably a result of.

In this sense, the articles in Grasseni and Paxson come closest to what we are concerned with in this piece. Yet, our collection proposes to probe further and explore the *effects* of hierarchies of power in determining what good food is. Our cases differ from the authors concerned with the reinvention of (good) food, whose fieldsites and actors engage with alternative food movements that define themselves largely in opposition to more conventional forms of food production, distribution, and consumption.

With one contrasting exception (Larmer), we approach the question of good food from the perspective of actors who do not identify with any form of alternative or activist movement. For most of our interlocutors, alternative and conventional, or local and global, notions of good food have to coexist and are negotiated on a regular basis. This raises interesting questions such as, What happens when different regimes of good food meet? Who has the power to determine what is considered good food and how? Are people and foods left behind? Are tastes diluted? Do variegated notions of good food become indistinguishable?

As this short review of recent literature already suggests, there is little consensus in the academy about definitions of good food, even while good foods have been successfully adapted to postmodern sentiments and global markets. Simultaneously, local actors appear to have a clear idea of what good food is, or at least act every day to produce and eat good food, despite the confusion. Yet, this multiplicity of good is also problematic. As shown through each of our case studies, not all good is acceptable to, or accepted by, the actors presented here, not least because there might be too many definitions of good coexisting at once, both on micro and macro scales. Although the many interlocutors portrayed below are always reinventing and critically redefining what good food means, we equally want to emphasize their resistance to especially proliferating, and often distancing, notions of goodness to

address what is amiss in much current debate: the effects of standardizing or commodifying food, which inevitably attempt to quantify food's value.

In this multi-authored piece, we seek to highlight how globally defined notions of food's goodness are often resisted on the ground by producers and consumers, especially because they are often also spatially or temporally distant. Not surprisingly, these processes are at times contradictory, at times ambivalent, and certainly always messy, even violent. In their ethnographic accounts from Istria and Morocco, Anna Colquhoun and Katharina Graf respectively show that distinct notions of what is good food exist on a decidedly local level, which often seem at odds with broader conceptualizations of good food. There is also a mismatch between goodness and profit-making in many of these cases; in Istria, the taste of ox meat is deemed inferior by some when it is (more industrially) produced for a tourist-oriented market, and (cheaper industrially produced) store-bought bread in Morocco loses much of its cultural value.

Similarly, in Camelia Dewan's ethnographic research in Bangladesh, not only does "modern," capital-intensive, high-yielding rice grown using synthetic agrochemicals have poor taste, its purity and nutritional value are also deemed tainted by her interlocutors. The mismatch between food production and ecology corrupts food's goodness in the search for profit, which is seen by some to ultimately result in weak humans, with questionable morality and poor health.

By contrast, Megan Larmer's ethnography shows how people working at an agricultural nonprofit in the state of New York challenge North American meat industry paradigms by drawing attention to the ethical and ecological benefits of regional, pasture-based livestock. The impossibility remains, however, of this meat competing on price with meat produced to the profit-driven standards of the global market. Mehroosh Tak's brief delves into this issue from a macro-economic perspective by exploring what happens when

big businesses—as opposed to states—gain the upper hand in determining what good food is. This has dire consequences for people’s health, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Indeed, the plurality of meanings that good food can acquire also intersects with ideas of health and well-being.

Francesca Vaghi’s ethnographic research explores the implications this has in the everyday lives of London parents with young children, by showing that what is good is not always the same as what is defined in national dietary guidelines and policies: What is good food for one child might not be so for another, and equally, what is deemed good food by experts one day is no longer so the next. In this context, the parents presented in Vaghi’s brief wonder what exactly they are supposed to feed their children, challenging the broader policies and discourses causing such confusion.

Brandi Simpson-Miller’s historical analysis highlights that contesting good food is not a recent development: Looking at the oral histories of the Sukpe along the Gold Coast (precolonial Ghana), she shows that the meaning of good food (established through ritual) enabled them to lay claim to land during the eighteenth century. On the one hand, good food allowed the Sukpe to assert ownership against the neighboring and competing Ewe and to participate in the global economy on their own terms—not as slaves, but as salt producers and exporters. On the other hand, these oral histories served the British colonial government to cement territorial claims in the following century. Meanwhile, in Claudia Prieto-Piastro’s ethnography, similar but ongoing geopolitical struggles in Israel and Palestine are encapsulated in a “new local,” bestowing on the food of “enemies” renewed goodness, making it edible while (deliberately?) forgetting its contested local origins.

In our final brief, Mukta Das uses an ethnographic account to sketch out an argument wherein good food, as it relates to tasty food, is highly political and often racialized. In a postcolonial setting such as Macau, the dynamics of casino money, morality, Michelin stars,

and heritage unite a racially diverse Portuguese-speaking elite over concerns with Macau's rapidly increasing wealth generated through casino revenue, as well as its poorly understood culinary past. Yet, the re-emergence of the dish of *porco balichão tamarinho* proves difficult to locate in older Lisbon-centered schemes of taste, reflecting a little of the current state of geopolitics and the ascendancy of China and Asia.

In pointing to the multiple, often contradictory, ways in which food can be good, our piece emphasizes how scholarly attention to various ways of contesting food's goodness—whether it be local or global, alternative or conventional, or simply spatially and temporally distant—can carry the debate about the value and meaning of food further. It shows how globally good food, for instance higher yielding seeds, can make you ill (Dewan) and may just not be good anymore from certain local perspectives (Colquhoun, Larmer, Graf).

Definitions and uses of broader notions of good food may also serve to lay claim to contested territorial or national identity and, in doing so, un- or redo them (Colquhoun, Prieto-Piastro, Simpson-Miller, Das). Finally, contemporary debates about what foods are good or bad may be just confusing and too manifold to mean anything in everyday discourses and practices (Vaghi), thus inviting in bigger players that can bypass existing local notions of good food altogether (Tak).

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Making Good Meat: From Draft Animal to Local Speciality

Anna Colquhoun

Increasingly, regions emphasize “local specialities” as iconic components of local cuisine and cultural heritage. In Croatian Istria, a breed of ox is being transformed from draft animal to gastronomic delicacy. Drawing on ongoing ethnographic research with food producers in Istria, I consider here how this meat’s value is created, what that tells us about wider dynamics in Istria, and how ideas about good food come about.

Across the peninsula's rural interior most families once kept one or two oxen to pull the plow. Their meat was eaten rarely, either as veal by wealthier townfolk, or slow-cooked into goulash after twenty-plus years of service. By the late 1980s, due to the prevalence of tractors combined with the decline of mixed farming and rural depopulation, the breed had nearly died out. After the Yugoslav wars, which decimated Croatia's mass coastal tourism, a breeders' association and the Istrian region's rural development agency (AZRRI) saw the opportunity to "re-valorize" the Ox as cultural and natural heritage, and as premium meat, fit for Istria's rebranding as a cultural and gastronomic tourism destination, and to create a locally embedded defense against newly available imported, cheaper beef. Following Grasseni and Paxson (2014), the Ox is a "reinvented" food.

[INSERT Figure 1.1 - Colquhoun]

Today, festivals celebrate the Ox with displays, souvenirs, and plowing competitions—now entertainment rather than backbreaking labor. The Ox is presented as ancient, natural, and part of an agricultural heritage unique to Istria, symbolic of the region's strength, resilience, and longevity despite having been variously within the territories of Venice, Austria, Italy, Yugoslavia, and Croatia. This plays well in the context of regionalist politics, with local politicians always keen to be seen at such events. Meanwhile, AZRRI incentivizes breeders to produce steers, which they buy, fatten for slaughter, and supply to higher-end restaurants and some rural *konobe* (taverns). The meat is supplied with mandatory culinary training and a certification scheme. As a local speciality, the meat's qualities of authenticity, "Istrianness," and superior flavor are presented as givens, rooted in place by way of ancient genes, farming practices, and distinctive local ecology, and as safeguarded by AZRRI.

So far so good. However, talking to a range of farmers and restaurateurs I detected divergences beneath this standard narrative. It is commonly held that *domaći* (home-

produced) food is better than that from “industrial” or distant sources, much like bread in Morocco (see Graf, below). Domaći is flexible, but implies knowability. The best meat, I am repeatedly told, comes “privately” from a known smallholder who fed the animal home-grown crops. For some, therefore, the larger-scale Ox fattening regime reduces the meat’s quality. And while certification asserts Istrian provenance and authenticity, for some it makes the meat less knowable, less domaći. Moreover, the scheme’s regulations bar “private” sales.

AZRRI worked hard on cross-breeding, feeding regimes, slaughter age, butchery, and aging to create bright red, quick-cooking cuts to suit modern global standards. But many remember the slow-cooked meat of a well-exercised older animal and prefer this “dark” meat to “supermarket meat,” which, as one konoba owner described with disgust, is pale and “soft like polenta in thirty minutes.” Ironically then, the local speciality is losing some distinctiveness as its qualities are being transformed to match global standards. For some, this represents higher-class taste, signals progress, and promises wealthier tourist customers. However, for others, it undermines Istria’s rural heritage and identity, and runs counter to small food producers’ and providers’ creation of value through their domaći credentials, which are not only appreciated by many local customers, but also a matter of pride and identity.

Higher-end urban restaurants often advertise their “creative” approach, combining local ingredients like Ox with novel flavors and modern techniques, while chefs at rural konobe stressed to me the importance of keeping dishes traditional and simple so as not to mask natural flavors, created by Istria’s unique conditions. For the former, good food is created by the talented chef, judged on a world stage, positioning Istria alongside other gastronomic destinations. For the latter, good food results from local knowledge, passed down from grandparents, and from natural resource management, positioning providers as “autochthonous” guardians of Istria’s agricultural heritage. Everyone agrees, however, Ox

meat is not suitable for *ćevapčići*, the minced meat patties popular across the former Yugoslavia. Such “Balkan” fare is deemed incompatible with “Istrian cuisine.”

[INSERT Figure 1.2 - Colquhoun]

This brief tour of a new local specialty demonstrates its tricky position. Producers materially and symbolically shape the Ox and its meat to create and capture value. In doing so, they engage with the product’s localness, a premium in the context of tourism and regionalism. This opens up questions of what, where, how, when, and who Istria is. In a borderland with several imperial legacies, linguistic and ethnic diversity, much emigration and immigration, long-standing urban/coast and rural/interior divisions, and recent entry into globalized food markets, such questions have few straightforward answers. Producers’ values and visions concerning place thus combine with the creation of economic value in “economies of sentiment” (Paxson 2013: 65) within which good food—its authenticity, Istrianness, and taste—is variously conceived and contested. The case of the Istrian Ox indicates the value of examining what, and who, makes local specialties good food, and within what power relations. At stake in the case of the Istrian Ox is not only the future of the breed, and associated husbandry practices, but also what kind of meat will be available, to whom, and with what economic opportunities for different producers. Furthermore, these material manifestations continue to play into conceptualizations and experiences of Istria and Istrianness, indicating the inevitably political nature of local specialties.

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A Good Death: Livestock Slaughter as Alternative Food System Advocacy

Megan Larmer

Pasture-based livestock farming is an ecologically sound economic opportunity for farmers in the Hudson River Valley. This is the thesis of “Pastured Protein” (2017), a report produced by Glynwood, the agricultural nonprofit where I work. My colleagues and I organized a sheep slaughtering workshop for chefs in May of 2017 in order to amplify the report’s message. Here I explore on-farm slaughter as a means of alternative food system advocacy, and the critical role aesthetics play in this strategy.

We recruited chefs for the workshop because they arbitrate taste, as noted by Colquhoun and Das elsewhere in this article. Chefs ascended from the labor to the professional class in the 1960s (Barber 2014: 137–41). Fame transformed them “into creators of culture, capable of bestowing knowledge and coolness on those who dine in their restaurants” (Hyman 2008: 47). The chefs’ journey from source to plate is a pervasive media trope. It marries the democratic ideal of firsthand knowledge with the distinction of professional expertise so that chefs gain the power to create high-status cultural signifiers from humble foods (Johnston and Baumann 2007). Sensory experience becomes the chefs’ social capital. Participating in animal slaughter increases chefs’ social capital, while confronting the problem with meat: death.

Death may only be reconciled as ethical, or good, if it is preceded by a “good life.” Presumed to provide animals with a high quality of life, holistic pasture management is the most ecological and humane form of animal husbandry. Practitioners’ focus on the interconnectedness of animal well-being and ecosystem health echoes the observations of

Dewan's interlocutors below. Pastures managed holistically create a patchwork of tall grass stands for future grazing, diffuse vegetation where animals actively graze, and resting pasture patinaed with new growth. At once untamed and domesticated, the landscape conforms to colonial ideals of democracy—maximum individual freedom within a rationalized system. Glynwood's farm is objectively more beautiful than a high-density animal feedlot, but for those acculturated to Western aesthetics and ethics of democracy, its regimented wildness is evocative of deeply held ideals of good living.

[INSERT Figure 2.1 - Larmer]

The day of the workshop was bright and clear. In the haymow, a chef confidently opened the sheep's body cavity with a knife. Another commented, "It's so much cleaner than I expected...and surprisingly lovely." Adam Danforth, the instructor, held the sheep's gallbladder to the sun to reveal an absinthe colored prism. He pointed to the animal's thick, dark liver as verification of her health. He inflated the bubblegum pink lungs with his mouth, recreating the sheep's recent breathing. We marveled at the soft mechanics. The group saw and smelled the same grass inside the sheep's ruminant as in the surrounding pasture, sensorially conflating her death, her life, and the landscape. Adam split her skull and pointed to the carefully placed and nearly bloodless captive bolt gun injury on the apple-sized brain—quick and painless. The beautiful pastures and lovely viscera aesthetically represented the goodness of the sheep's life to the chefs, and therefore the goodness of her death, resulting in ethically de-problematized meat.

These chefs leveraged and built their social capital by sharing photos from the workshop on social media, but said that procurement changes in their restaurants would not be economically viable. The commodity meat market, dominated by multinational corporations, provides meat at a fraction of the price. These chefs' followers and diners are themselves taste-makers with money and cultural literacy who could potentially bring

regional, pasture-raised meat into “good taste.” Yet, the impact of good taste is unpredictable. Should the market for pasture-raised meat increase, a smaller percentage of its consumers will have the means (or desire) to participate in on-farm experiences, potentially disembedding the meat from the landscape and life of the animal as it becomes commodified, and as pressures increase to compete at a price point comparable to meat from the globalized production chain. This process could obfuscate or even sever the connection between meats marketed as pasture raised and the ecological and animal welfare benefits of holistic livestock management.

[INSERT Figure 2.2 - Larmer]

Food system advocates design trainings and workshops around the premise that on-farm experiences persuade people more potently than reports and op-eds. Access to such experiences is extremely limited (Weiss 2012), and in an advocacy setting participants are targeted strategically to maximize an organization’s finite resources. Chefs are coveted participants because of their cultural cache. Like all imperfect grasps at a more perfect world, this strategy will need to be consistently re-examined and coordinated with other advocacy efforts to have meaningful impact on how animals are raised and killed for food.

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Impure Foods: Entanglements of Soil, Food, and Human Health in Bangladesh

Camelia Dewan

This brief explores a local ontology of health and purity of food in Bangladesh to discuss the effects of agricultural “modernization” and how it is transforming people’s relationship to the land and ultimately their sense of self and well-being. It contributes to existing debates on the moral dimensions of what constitutes good food by looking at the tension between globally good foods such as high-yielding varieties of rice that aim to combat hunger and local (*desi*) rice, grown more slowly and without (imported, nonquality assured) agrochemicals, which is perceived as purer, tastier, and more nutritious.

During my ethnographic fieldwork in Bangladesh, my interlocutors described how food was grown without synthetic chemicals in the past; it was filled with both *shakti* (strength, power) and *pushti* (nutrition). In contrast, food today—grown with synthetic chemicals—is *bhejal* (impure, adulterated) and lacks strength and nutrition. Bhejal foods, they argued, make current generations weak and ill, while the use of agrochemicals degrades the soil for future cultivation. The current landscape of food production and development aid has moved away from a local ontology of health, where the self is entangled with the soil, and is instead reproducing a socially unjust, toxic, and unsustainable food system. Instead of producing good food, the current agricultural system in Bangladesh is producing impure, harmful foods, similar to the large-scale production of soft wheat in Morocco (see Graf below). This illustrates the contentiousness of a universally good food of high-yielding

varieties—promoted globally as a means to combat Third World poverty and hunger (see also Tak) — that is seen as antithetical to food locally conceived as “good.”

[INSERT Figure 3.1 - Dewan]

The Bengali proverb “rice and fish makes a Bengali” highlights the importance of food for identity. This, in turn, is tied to ideas of how humans are connected not only to the food they eat, but the soil from which the food originates. My elderly interlocutor Fupu described that since the introduction of high-yielding IRRI (International Rice Research Institute) rice and its dependence on synthetic nitrogen, there is less shakti in the soil and thus less shakti in the food and, ultimately, less shakti in humans. Shakti means power and, in Hinduism, shakti is the primordial cosmic energy that gives birth to the universe: Shakti is the mother goddess (Lowitz and Datta 2004: 111). Farmers explained that synthetic fertilizers lack shakti and thereby “suck the earth dry,” making it inhospitable to earthworms essential for shakti. While synthetic nitrogen is only one of many nutrients, organic matter fertilizers like manure and compost consist of an assemblage of the macro- and micronutrients a plant requires, filled with earthworms and all other microorganisms essential for soil fertility. Both shakti and micronutrients are invisible to the eye. The soil itself is a universe of micronutrients, microorganisms, and earthworms.

Tsing (2015) suggests that different species influence each other in open-ended assemblages. Both Ingold (2008) and Tsing (2015) use fungi as a basis to illustrate how organisms and nature are entangled, and the multitude of ways in which they interact. We still do not fully understand the assemblages of species in the soil, and to what extent the concerns regarding the loss of micronutrients, microorganisms, and shakti may potentially be connected. Due to the lack of shakti in food, my interlocutors argued, younger generations are weaker and more prone to illness. High-yielding rice may produce large quantities, but its lack of strength reduces the goodness of rice.

The lack of shakti is further exacerbated by the lack of food safety enforcement in Bangladesh. The (over)use of synthetic fertilizer makes IRRI rice “sweet” and attractive to pests. In contrast to “bitter” local varieties, IRRI rice cannot be cultivated without pesticides. Many of the pesticides used by Bangladeshi farmers are banned by the WHO and described as “obsolete,” such as Endrin and organochlorines like DDT. Banned pesticides and contaminated fertilizers are easily smuggled into Bangladesh. Fupu pointed out that the environment has become toxic and that all food today is bhejal. Bhejal food denotes an impurity borne from adding external substances that diminish the quality of the food itself, whether it be too much synthetic urea, poisonous pesticides, formalin (to prevent rot), ripening chemicals, fillers (brick powder in spices, motor oil in cooking oil), or unregulated colorings. My interlocutors explained that bhejal foods contribute to kidney, liver, and stomach problems; stroke, cancer, and heart problems were also on the rise.

[INSERT Figure 3.2 - Dewan]

With the intensification of commercial agriculture and the commodification of food, food shifted from being embedded in a social context to an anonymous commodity to be sold in a depersonalized market by nameless sellers. The local understanding of how soil, food, and humans are entangled—captured in the transmission of shakti—has been lost. As profits increased, shakti necessary for human health decreased and bhejal foods came to dominate the market. The concept of bhejal in the Bangladeshi context points to the ways in which things are allowed to become adulterated, whether through an overuse of fertilizer and a lack of shakti, the use of banned and toxic pesticides, or the adulteration of food—all in order to increase profit. As both rice and fish have become bhejal through large-scale, globally oriented production, Bengalis themselves have become bhejal: both morally and physically corrupted, with an embodied weakness ridden with ill health.

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Global Food Systems and Local Diets

Mehroosh Tak

Diets in developing countries are increasingly mirroring global food consumption patterns of high sugar, salt, and fat intake from processed and packaged foods, and are less likely to include foods that are micronutrient rich (Pingali 2015). This global dietary transition is accompanied by the increasing burden of overweight and obese conditions on health, while limited progress has been made to tackle undernutrition (Global Panel 2016). Although demand-side factors, such as rapid urbanization and rising disposable incomes, have been recognized, little is known about the supply-side determinants that drive changes in food systems influencing diets in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). Existing evidence has focused on the process of food systems modernization, and links between food systems and consumer diets have not been conclusively explored.

The macro-economic research in this brief reviews literature on global food systems to better understand how and why global food patterns are changing. It sheds light on the drivers of food systems changes that influence dietary transition in LMICs. Four drivers of food systems changes are identified, relating to agricultural production, markets and trade systems, food transformation, and retail and procurement. Together these changes determine

the shifts in what types of food, good or otherwise, are available on shop shelves for consumers to buy.

Globally, governments of many LMICs have made great strides in achieving food security and reducing hunger. Public investments for the purpose of food security typically favor calories over nutrition, while institutional investments have predominantly centered around rice, wheat, and maize. As also discussed in Dewan's brief above, the focus of food and agricultural policies has been on calorie sufficiency (Pingali 2015). This specialization of agriculture has led to a global decline in diversity of crop production (Khoury et al. 2014). Simultaneously, progress on increased consumption of micronutrients has been dismally slow, while the growing sales of ultra-processed foods and beverages are further contributing toward the greater intake of calories, sugars, salt, and fats (Baker 2016).

In LMICs, traditionally national governments and their related nongovernmental agencies oversaw governed food systems (Rashid and Gulati 2008). The increased liberalization of agricultural sectors in LMICs, with the implementation of structural adjustment programs, poverty-reduction strategy papers, and regional trade treaties, has opened a space for the increasing role of the private sector in governing agricultural production systems, as well as which and how good and healthy foods are consumed (Hawkes et al. 2012). The shift away from state control to free market and trade has created opportunities for food-consuming industries (FCIs)—such as agro-processors and food service outlets like fast food outlets and street vendors—to decide the nutritional quality and content of foods available in the marketplace. It is thus important to recognize that production decisions are influenced not only by consumer demand, but also by FCIs that “value-add” via food transformation and production differentiation for targeted individualized preferences—such as ready-to-eat meals or cut vegetables (Hawkes et al. 2012). FCIs that use agricultural

produce to manufacture readily consumable food items have a crucial part to play in transforming diets in light of rapid urbanization.

The wave of new retail systems due to foreign investments has had a cumulative effect on the growth of agro-processing sectors (Tschirley et al. 2013). In some countries, foreign investments have been able to restructure the agro-processing sector by consolidation of SMEs, multinationalization, and specialization of processing in niche product markets (Wilkinson 2004). The rising influence of multinationals, paired with a lessening of the state's regulatory influence in agriculture and food sectors, is changing the structure and governance of food systems in LMICs. This has crucial repercussions with respect to which crops are cultivated, as well as on food transformation and the availability of good foods.

The transformation of global food systems has thus created both opportunities and challenges for what constitutes good food that is both available and affordable. The opportunities include moving away from the legacy of calorie-focused policy bias toward holistic nutrition-smart food systems. At the same time, the challenge lies in the rising relative power of the private sector over national governments. This raises concerns over who decides what constitutes good food, and how accessible and affordable such foods are to the most vulnerable.

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Children's Food: Material and Discursive Contradictions

Francesca Vaghi

Nutritional guidelines occupy an unclear and changeable position in public health discourse (Young 2002; Caraher and Dowler 2007). How this adds pressure and anxiety in a global

situation of rising obesity rates and other noncommunicable diseases is worthy of attention, as is also suggested by other authors in this article (see Dewan and Das). Indeed, while access to nutritional advice is seemingly straightforward, the task of feeding children is defined by myriad contested knowledges and practices. In the state-maintained childcare setting in inner London where I conducted ethnographic research, both early years practitioners and parents regularly expressed confusion over nutritional guidelines. Notions of good, or healthy, food were discussed rather homogeneously, following public health guidelines and the categories of the “eatwell plate.” Predictably, fresh fruits and vegetables were highly valued, as was full-fat milk. Cereals, other dairy products, meat, and fish were also encouraged.

Nonetheless, these recommendations become contradictory when paired to specific concerns about children’s health, particularly obesity and sugar intake. Fruit, for example, became unexpectedly controversial at the beginning of 2017, when new voluntary guidelines for the early years encouraged service providers to limit children’s fruit consumption to reduce their sugar intake. When this began to be implemented, one of the school staff members I worked with remarked, “Every so often they come up with something that needs to be changed. I never thought it would be fruit.” One of the parents told me, “I discovered that [dried fruit is] a total no-no when I took [my son] to the dentist the first time, and she said, ‘You might as well give him a packet of candy’.... I used to take him to other children’s centers [and] one of the places mentioned that to the parents, but others didn’t ... you get really conflicting messages from people.” Similarly, other parents voiced their concerns when they received recommendations to not include salt in their toddlers’ diets, while simultaneously also being told that cheese (which has a high salt content) is an appropriate source of protein for children.

[INSERT Figure 4.1 - Vaghi]

The ways in which these contradictions and ambiguities shape families' eating habits have implications that go beyond the private sphere of the household. Recent rhetoric in children's food policy resonates with political debates about class and the family in England that date back to the late 1990s (Dermott and Pomati 2016). In this context, good food in the early years becomes a contested category on a material level, and on a discursive level the concept of good food is inevitably tied to notions about "good parenting." Food can cause physical harm, yet it can also be "socially dangerous" insofar as parents' ability to make "good choices" largely impacts how they are viewed by official actors and by each other. Concurrently, whether or not they are perceived as able to make such decisions is largely linked to classed assumptions about what good parenting is. One of my participants, a young, single mother living on benefits, said: "Lots of people judge you for being incapable of leading your own life.... I think people look at me and probably think I don't know how to cook and that I probably feed [my daughter] freezer food all day."

Children's health and parenting are deeply interrelated issues in U.K. policy (Macvarish, Lee, and Lowe 2014); (white) middle-class parenting practices are often portrayed as the model to aspire to, and which are promoted in dietary interventions (O'Connell and Brannen 2016: 81–82). This approach has been criticized, as it "[assumes] parents are willing and able to prioritize nutrition" (ibid.), and portrays parenting "as the solution to social problems" so that the "role of material resources is downplayed" (Dermott and Pomati 2016: 128). This reinforces the notion that individual choice is ultimately one of the strongest determinants of health (Ulijaszek and McLennan 2016), framing those unable to make "healthy choices" as flawed and in need of intervention.

It is thus people's perceived ability to make "healthy choices" that continues to necessitate interrogation, particularly in an advanced liberal society such as the U.K.'s: while the widely held assumption that everyone has equal access of opportunity remains, increasing

rates of food poverty and widening health inequalities suggest otherwise (Goisis, Sacker, and Kelly 2016; O’Connell et al. 2018). By a similar token, the power to contest official nutritional guidelines is not evenly held by all actors, and this is a particularly salient issue in a setting as diverse as London. For instance, middle-class mothers were more likely to voice their frustration with *and* dismissal of health advice they did not find useful, while working-class mothers, who might have been equally skeptical of certain recommendations, tended not to.

Ultimately, it is imperative to continue assessing how harmful assumptions about disadvantaged groups are perpetuated, and to challenge a rhetoric that centers on individual choice as a main determinant of health. Addressing these issues is crucial to understanding children’s food as a contested discourse, in which power relations and class dynamics are constantly being negotiated.

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The Price of Homemade Bread

Katharina Graf

Notwithstanding a shift toward more sugars, fats, and proteins that mirrors a global trend, cereals, largely in the form of bread, remain the staple of the Moroccan diet and, indeed, of Moroccan (food) culture. Most Moroccans eat bread with nearly every meal: It is the tool to pick up food, the conveyor of a dish's taste, the guarantor of physical satiation, and the basis of sharing and hospitality. Yet, as my ethnographic research in the cities of Marrakech and Beni Mellal revealed, not all bread is equal. There are multiple and contested qualities that define "good" bread.

At the same time, bread is politically sensitive. Despite gradual economic liberalization and rapidly rising global wheat prices, the Moroccan government keeps flour and bread prices low to avoid social unrest. In such a context, asking what good bread is means asking who determines its values and how, and evokes hierarchies of power and the

ways they are challenged by ordinary people, similar to the other cases in this article. I document how mundane daily practices such as breadmaking in urban Morocco subtly resist governmental wheat policies, which, willingly or not, destabilize these very practices.

Following Counihan (1999), I treat bread as a Maussian “total social fact,” connecting not just the economic and sociocultural, but also the political, aesthetic, symbolic and physiological dimensions of everyday life. As such, bread intimately connects ordinary people to their government. What does it mean when values, bodies and power are materially and symbolically connected and condensed in a loaf of bread? To answer these questions, I propose a theory of value that incorporates “the importance of actions” (Graeber 2001), in particular homemaking and women’s domestic labor.

[INSERT Figure 5.1 - Graf]

When exploring breadmaking practices to understand what good bread is and for whom, two seemingly contradictory values stand out. Although cheap flour and bread were highly valued by all my research participants (see also Prieto-Piastro below), whose poverty and food insecurity made price a key consideration in daily practices of sourcing and preparing cereal products, homemade flour and bread were equally cherished. In making and eating bread, ordinary citizens are thus not only symbolically but also materially connected to their government, whose political legitimacy historically rests on its ability to provide food security. By guaranteeing a minimal supply of cheap flour and bread, the *makhzen* (literally “granary,” but also designating the monarchy and its political allies) that rules the country since the seventeenth century has been able to stay in power to the present day (Holden 2009). Despite a general trend toward economic liberalization since the 1980s, a large section of wheat production and distribution is still controlled through flexible import tariffs, subsidies, and price controls to assure a steady and cheap supply of mainly industrially milled flour and commercially produced bread. The production of soft wheat (*fors*) has benefited

from government-supported modernization and expansion since the French Protectorate (1912–56), but nearly half of domestically consumed soft wheat is still imported.

At the same time, homemaking and women's domestic labor are key ingredients of bread's value, women's increasing participation in the labor market notwithstanding. Most families I worked with had rural origins and self-identified as poor, and all invariably preferred homemade leavened bread for its better taste and texture, its spiritual and bodily benefits, and a general desire "to know where it comes from and what's in it." For many of them, its preparation included the bulk sourcing of domestically grown hard wheat (*gmeh*) grains through kin in the rural hinterlands or on the weekly market, as well as milling and sieving these into flour in small neighborhood mills. To make bread, this wholemeal flour was then blended with cheap, industrially milled, and refined soft wheat flour.

[INSERT Figure 5.2 - Graf]

By kneading cheap flour into their daily bread, these families thus "stretched" the more expensive and labor-intensive homemade flour. Only the poorest of my research participants bought commercially produced bread on a regular basis, and even they still sought to buy bread that contained at least some wholemeal flour, and made their own bread whenever they could. Homemade bread thus ambiguously blends affordable and cheap, but otherwise undesirable and foreign, soft wheat flour with pricey and labor-intensive, but domestically grown and knowable, hard wheat grains. While the former is the basis of urban food security and valued as such in both everyday breadmaking practices and governmental policies similar to IRRI rice in Bangladesh (Dewan), the latter allows ordinary and predominantly poor urban Moroccans to uphold values associated with their rural origins (Graf forthcoming) and allows them to reclaim some form of power vis-à-vis their government.

Thus, by making good bread, urban Moroccans express both their continued expectation of cheap flour and bread, while at the same time upholding agricultural and rural values that stand in sharp contrast to governmental policies benefiting imports and large-scale agriculture and displacing smaller-scale domestic wheat production.

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Can the Food of Our Enemies Become Good Food?

Claudia Prieto-Piastro

How did Palestinian food become good food for Israelis? There is no question that the relationship Israelis have with Palestinians is complex, to say the least. Yet, dishes like falafel and hummus, which have undoubtedly Arab roots, are now considered part of the Israeli culinary repertoire; sometimes they are even labeled as Israeli national dishes. How can the food of an enemy become edible, and even a source of national pride?

As pointed out in the introduction, good food is not only defined in terms of nutrition but also in terms of morality and, therefore, of ownership. Palestinian food went through a process of denationalization and appropriation in order to become good food for Israelis. In

other words, Palestinian food became good food by losing its label of Palestinian, and by simply becoming “Arab” food. In order to become good food for Israelis, it changed its national and moral connotations. Palestinian food was given a regional label instead of a national one, making it edible for those Israelis who were not willing to accept the existence of a Palestinian nation. This process of “reinvention” not only denationalized the food, but also the cooks who have to possess certain characteristics that make them acceptable and good in order to successfully sell their food.

The relationship between Palestinian and Israeli food began even before the State of Israel was established. The first Jewish settlers to arrive in Pre-Mandate Palestine from Europe not only attempted to build a new nation, but also to construct a unique and collective Hebrew identity that highlighted their connection between the land and their new inhabitants, as well as among the different Jewish communities that were arriving. The new immigrants had different diets that corresponded to the historical trajectory of their community and they had only religious dietary restrictions in common. In order to construct a national culture and identity, the authorities used different tactics to homogenize the population, including their diets. The authorities tried to avoid the inclusion of Arab local traditions, but the admiration the pioneers had for the locals’ culinary traditions, and the need to learn to cook with new local ingredients, made this impossible.

The inclusion of Palestinian dishes and ingredients in the Jewish Israeli diet was a violent, complex process. This complicated path, by which local Arab food became good food for Israel, is what Richard Wilk denominates a process of creolization. Wilk applies the term to the case of Belize, to describe what was “hardly a smooth blending process. Instead, it was work, compounded of appropriation and resistance, full of ambivalence and ambiguity” (Wilk 2006: 109). In Israel, the enemy’s food became good food by substituting ingredients and disguising others, making them kosher, changing the names of dishes and

their national belonging, in some cases not only by denationalizing them but by giving them a new Jewish character.

This creolization process is ongoing. Although many left-wing Israelis will now frequent Palestinian restaurants (managed by Jewish Israelis or Palestinians), others continue to prefer calling it Arab food. In this case, Palestinian food only becomes good food by hiding its national origins and giving it the more neutral, although still controversial, label of “Arab” food. Therefore, in order to label Palestinian food as good food its moral dimension becomes fundamental. For example, to be considered good food, cooks and restaurateurs should be perceived as friendly toward the State of Israel. Aboulafia’s, a Palestinian-owned bakery established in Jaffa in 1879, is particularly popular among Jewish Israelis who visit the area. The bakery’s popularity resides in the perception of some Israelis—including most of the participants of my research—that the owners of this bakery are loyal to the State of Israel. According to one of my interlocutors, the owners were not only loyal during the Palestinian intifadas (uprisings), but they are also Christian. In fact, Aboulafia is owned by a Muslim family, but in the eyes of my interlocutor, it is easier for a Christian Arab to be a “good Arab” than for a Muslim one (Mamdani 2002).

Although the political preferences and the religion of a cook, or owner of a food business, are not the only aspects that mark the transformation of Palestinian food into good food for Israelis, they play a key role for part of the population. Through a process of creolization that goes as far as to disguise religion, what were once considered national dishes by Palestinians came to be Israel’s national dishes and, with time, perhaps even their origins will be forgotten.

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The Moral and Ethical Aspects of Gold Coast Foodways

Brandi Simpson-Miller

In the eighteenth-century Gold Coast, just east of present-day Accra, good food established and maintained the identity, safety, and continuity of the Sukpe community. English Colonial District Record Books from 1912 documented the oral history of the Dangme-speaking peoples' migration from Nigeria to the mouth of the Volta River on the Atlantic. Oral histories were collected as part of the Crown Lands Bill of 1897, meant to ascertain how tribes came to acquire the lands they currently inhabited. Following documentation of histories, boundaries were mapped, and certificates of validity were issued to facilitate negotiations for gold concessions. In an extension of the discussion of purity and strength—or *shakti*—that Dewan explores, and in contrast to Prieto-Piastro's discussion of food's role in obscuring place in conflicts that involve different religious and national identities, the Sukpe used food and faith to fix boundaries. This history deals with the anxiety created by British efforts to appropriate fallow lands for gold production, and the need for local people to maintain their connection to and ownership of the land with regular sacrifices of food.

A cooking contest won the migrating Sukpe control over the vital salt and fishing trade on the Volta River; a trade which would sustain them throughout the cessation of the transatlantic slave trade in the nineteenth century. On an urgent survey expedition, the

wulomei (priest) and hunter Lomo-weir encountered the Ewe-speaking Ahaviatse, another expeditionary hunter from nearby Agavedon, on the eastern side of the Volta. They disputed fervently among themselves as to who first saw the land and creeks thereon, including the nearby Nyito creek. Both resignedly decided that each would go to his home to bring back fire. No sooner had Ahaviatse left than Lomo-weir furtively took flint from his hunting bag, made a fire, and cooked some fish from the creek.

Lomo-weir may have fried this fish in palm oil with Spanish peppers, or perhaps cooked a ragout of fish with hibiscus, bits of smoked fish, palm oil, and Spanish peppers. He ate and left some for Ahaviatse. Upon the Ewe hunter's return, he found chop (food) ready for him. The dispute was resolutely settled in favor of Lomo-weir. The victorious Sukpe gained the lands from the Mi valley in the west, inclusive of the land between the lagoon and the coast, all the way to the Volta in the east. The hunters willingly befriended each other, with Ahaviatse choosing to resettle his people near Lomo-weir's, creating the settlement named Big Ada. The present-day Greater Accra Region of Ghana, where Big Ada is still located, would become especially prosperous in the nineteenth century due to its trade in palm oil, fish, and salt.

[INSERT Figure 6.1 - Simpson-Miller]

How did Lomo-weir manage to win the land with its vital fishing rights and salt production capabilities simply by being the first to cook supper? The Sukpe wielded ritual food preparation as a weapon with which to gain advantage over the Ewe-speaking inhabitants near the Volta River. As a priest, Lomo-weir's function was to read the will of local gods and spirits, and appeal to them for assistance. A priest was also charged with the establishment and maintenance of shrines for this purpose. Food was the most common sacrifice at these shrines. Lomo-weir would have observed ritual while hunting and preparing food, in sacrifice and thanks to local deities. In a place and time where sin was equated with

the neglect of deities, iniquity itself could be expunged, and land ownership was established, by the offering of food sacrifice. Thus, good food was contingent upon observances of the moral and ethical dimensions of the local spiritual landscape.

In the case of the Sukpe, Lomo-weir's ritual food observances helped to further ensure the survival and stability of his people in their flight to safety. This historical and ritual cooking contest empowered the Sukpe to rightfully establish a stronghold in a place far away from the slave raids of the ever-expanding Akan empire to the west. Later in the twentieth century, the story of this cooking contest was accepted by the British colonial government as a foundation for the demarcation of Sukpe lands. Good food to the Sukpe was ritual food that had powerful spiritual significance, and which was used to give them the influence and authority to make a new place for themselves on the coast.

In this migration story, food and its transformation into nourishment with fire decided claims about the division of resources and determined, in part, relations among people. Food's ritual use as a spatial marker was testament to the power of the transformative properties of cooking. Lest we forget the crucial role cooking plays in the story of being human, this history shows how good food and cooking enabled eighteenth-century West Africans to lay claim to, and to create a future for, themselves.

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Postcolonial Macau: Race, Morality, Taste, and Power

Mukta Das

“Maquista cooking.” “The world’s first fusion cuisine.” These are two of many epithets that describe Macanese food in various recognition projects. Macanese food has already ascended to Macau’s list of intangible cultural heritage in 2012. As an ex-Portuguese colony and a special administrative region of China since 1999, Macau’s next challenge is inclusion on China’s Material Cultural Heritage list, before UNESCO world heritage status can swim into view.

This recent postcolonial context is significant when it comes to notions of good food as tasty food. Unlike the Gold Coast (Simpson-Miller), Boileau (2010) argues that the Portuguese colonial empire was one of the most vertically integrated for raw and processed ingredients, such as rice and sauces. Far from celebrating the diversity in the fusing of a Portuguese corpus of pork, oil, wine, vinegar, and bread with local ingenuity and substitutions, a postcolonial Lusophone symbolic economy places the taste of Macanese food in a hierarchy of similar dishes. Lisbon becomes the arbiter of good taste, much like the chefs in Colquhoun’s or Larmer’s briefs above. However, in this context arbiters use comparative, racialized interpretations of social value. These interpretations are often deeply, invisibly embedded in contemporary work, for example to identify a national cuisine or to write national cookbooks in Luso-African contexts (Cusack 2003).

Macau remains relatively Portuguese and is very rich. Therefore it is hard to locate Lisbon in such spatial culinary power relations. As a result of handover agreements enacted in 1999 when Portugal ceded Macau to China, many Portuguese-speaking Macanese hold Portuguese passports and consider themselves both Portuguese and Macanese, reflecting the

messiness of postcolonial elite dispositions elsewhere. Since deregulation of the casino economy in the last two decades, Macau is one of the wealthiest places in the world, generating US\$80,000 GDP per capita compared to US\$21,000 in Portugal (World Bank 2017). Europeans, including many Portuguese, remain in Macau and occupy prominent positions in the municipality. In line with other Portuguese-speaking elites, they shape discourses about the troubling morality of a city so newly enriched. Revulsion at drugs, prostitution, and, as argued here, the taste of food are significant social and racial markers in this discourse.

In a city where Portuguese elites are racially diverse, performances of white European appetite have a function but are also challenged. To understand this I consider Rozin et al.'s (2009) argument that people feel and perform disgust in line with the morality of their environment. When placed in articulation with Wilk's (1995) study on the politics of values, race, and aesthetics in the ex-colony of Belize this creates a productive intersection between whiteness, morality, taste, and disgust to study postcolonial dynamics of food and identity.

Among the many Macanese dishes to emerge in the decades before handover (Augustin-Jean 2012) *porco balichão tamarinho* is an intersectional example *par excellence*. The dish divides opinion in ways that other Macanese dishes do not. For example, Portuguese egg tarts in Macau elicit relatively candid views, with those privy to tarts in Portugal bemoaning Macau's local bakers' miserliness with refined white sugar, eggs, and cream. Such criticisms are co-constituted alongside Macau's accumulation of Michelin stars for its food and patisserie, including locally made egg tarts, and recenter Lisbon in arbitrations of taste.

At Macau's influential Institute for Tourism Studies, where renowned chefs from Europe, the United States, and Japan come to teach classes, the teaching restaurant holds a weekly Macanese buffet. *Porco balichão tamarinho*, made with pork belly, fermented shrimp

paste, and tamarind, often appears on the buffet menu. Sitting with and observing diners being enticed into eating the dish by Macanese friends, it was clear that performances of dislike could not rely on candid comparative exercises. Unlike tarts, there was no Portuguese equivalent that people could use to stratify the local dish. Instead, the frequent performances of (polite) dislike at its taste centered on what appeared to be an inexplicable fusion of Asian ingredients.

Such dislike was often met with an elaborate rebuttal. Under this mighty roof, local Macanese friends often argued global culinary styles had failed to interpret Macanese home cooking. Family recipes were compared: Was the shrimp paste lengthened with Chinese rice wine or Portuguese brandy or both? Was it better to add lemon, spices, and fresh chillies? Implicit in such notions is that the axis for good-tasting Lusophone food has shifted from substituting European ingredients to negotiating Asian components. With this shift, criticisms of European palatal underdevelopment take on the aura of displays of white European weakness captured in Safavid paintings of naïve European traders at a time when Persian intermediaries controlled the flow of spices and other exotics between Asia and Europe (Babaie 2009).

For Lisbon-centered appetites in Macau, *porco balichão tamarinho* signals at Macau's troubling too-much-too-soon moral environment, but it is precisely the layering of Asian flavors that demonstrate Macau's position in a shift in postcolonial dynamics of food and identity that overturn hegemonic, European-centered, symbolic economies of good taste.

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