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Globalization and food

The dialectics of globality and locality

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Tell me what thou eatest, and I will tell thee who thou art.

(Alexis Soyer)

The destiny of nations depends on the manner in which they are fed.

(Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin)

It hadn't been a great year for wild sockeye, prices were up at the market and farmed Chilean salmon finally made it into the seafood risotto. It didn't taste bad, exactly; it just didn't taste *right*. ... A fish pen up the coast from Santiago might as well be up the coast from Osaka or Vladivostok or Campbell River. The fish in such a pen lived independent of geography, food chain or ecosystem. These salmon were perfectly commodified as a result, immune to the restrictions of place. There was no *where* that these fish were *from*. And to what end had he made this critical sacrifice, made this culinary homeless risotto that no amount of saffron butter would resurrect?

(Taylor, 2001: 171)

Introduction

The great nineteenth-century gourmet Brillat-Savarin, quoted above, lived in a period where confident assertions about the cultural 'purity' of national cuisines and foodways could be agreed to by all persons of good sense. French cuisine seemed to be as markedly different from its Anglo-Saxon and Germanic neighbours as it was from the cooking of Japan and China, a view shared by people all across Europe. Thus when searching for a way in *Ecce Homo* to describe the cultural essence of the Germans, Nietzsche's (1967: 238) mind seemed naturally to turn to matters of cuisine:

[As to] German cuisine quite generally – what doesn't it have on its conscience! Soup before the meal ... overcooked meats, vegetables cooked with fat and flour; the degeneration of pastries and puddings into paperweights! Add to this the virtually bestial prandial drinking habits of the ancient, and by no means only the ancient, Germans, and you will understand the origin of the German spirit – from distressed intestines.

For those living in the late Victorian period, one could be pretty certain that the world was like a culinary mosaic, made up of various national or regional pieces which were relatively incommensurate with each other, each possessed of its own distinctive alimentary *Volksgeist*.

The world in the present day may well continue to be ‘torn and rent by varying views on nutriment’, but not in the same ways, and not for the same reasons, as the writers of the late nineteenth-century imagined. This is for a range of reasons, which this chapter will outline and explore. **The contemporary world condition of food and cuisine differs from that which pertained a century ago in many ways, the main ones being:** (a) a globe-spanning (but certainly not fully integrated) system of food production and distribution has developed over time, especially since the end of World War II; (b) this system, once relatively unchallenged and hidden from the view of most people, has become a source of very public problems, crises, and contestations, especially those centred on the ‘health’ of both humans, animals, and plant-life across the planet; (c) present-day food and cuisine **exhibit a range of markedly homogenizing tendencies**, such that ‘global McDonaldization’ has become one central way in which social actors, of various political hues and dispositions, can imagine and reflect upon contemporary social conditions; (d) relatedly, opposition and hostility to perceived global food homogenization increasingly takes the form of the invention of culinary traditions and the alleged ‘rediscovery’ of ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ ingredients and modes of food preparation and consumption.

In these various ways, then, food today is not only structured by both ‘globalizing’ and ‘localizing’ social, political, economic, and cultural forces; it also very often figures as a symbol of these forces, as a crucial stake and resource in the struggles they both express and compel, and as a means by which they are enacted and performed. As Georg Simmel (1997) noted a century ago, food is not just an absolutely essential component of any social order’s material functioning; it is also – **once transformed by cultural processing into ‘cuisine’ – a key means of both expressing and regulating sociality**. Of all possible sets of phenomena that can symbolize particular epochs of human history, it seems that food and cuisine are particularly able to represent the tendencies of an age, its hopes and fears, its sense of what the ‘good life’ is and which forces threaten to destroy the latter altogether. Food thus can figure as both *promesse de bonheur* and as the index of approaching apocalypse. In an age of endemic globalization and globality, food both symbolically expresses and is materially constituted in ways that make it a quintessential aspect of the contemporary social order, for it is wholly caught up within the dialectics of globality and locality, of placelessness and situatedness, of brave new worlds and fear-ridden nostalgias.

The salmon used unwillingly by the fictional Vancouver chef in Timothy Taylor’s novel cited above, very well embody many of these elements. Reared in a Chilean salmon farm such that they ‘lived independent of geography, food chain or ecosystem’ and were thus ‘immune to the restrictions of place’, they seem to be globalized commodities of the first order, the piscine equivalents of the Big Mac and the bottle of Coca-Cola. They point to the dynamics of globalized capitalist agri-business, the tentacles of which reach out all across the planet, traducing apparently age old ecosystems and culinary cultures alike. They also point to endemic factory farming on a massive scale, and to burgeoning fears of what effects genetically-modified creatures and crops will have on the bio-systems of the planet in the medium- and long-terms. But their radically un-situated, hyper-commodified nature – so unsettling because so apparently ‘unnatural’ – also indicates senses of nostalgia as to biotic conditions and culinary traditions apparently

lost forever that goes together with such developments, such sensibilities generating attempts to recapture rooted feelings of history and tradition in and through food. The dialectics of globality and locality in food keep generating ever more senses of crisis and loss, which in turn are productive of projects to create feelings of stability, security, and sense of place in culinary terms.

In a recent book on the subject of food globalization, Nutzenadel and Trentmann (2008: 1) argue, ‘in much of the literature on globalization food has played little more than a Cinderella role, marginalized and subordinated to the leading cast of financial markets, migration, communication and transnational political cooperation’. This is true to a certain extent, as in the plethora of work on globalization that has appeared in the last fifteen years or so, food has not figured as a major point of focus or interest. However, this situation varies from one academic discipline to another, with a lot of research on globalized (or localized) foodways being carried out, as we will see below, in anthropology in particular, and also in the sorts of sociology closely related to the latter. Such studies tend – by dint of the ethnographic method they generally employ – to be focused on micro-level processes, while studies of global food systems and regimes have been carried out more by political economists, often those of a radical hue. In this chapter, we will examine the results of both sorts of work, as well as the valuable contributions of historians, which have amply demonstrated both that contemporary food globalization is not wholly historically unprecedented, and that present-day developments have to be contextualized within the broader dynamics of world history.

Histories of food globalization

While the globalization of food and cuisine is arguably particularly a phenomenon of the twentieth century and after, there have been discernible trends towards the ‘proto-globalization’ of food production, distribution and consumption in earlier historical periods. For the historical anthropologist Jack Goody (1982), the main impetus behind such trends for most of human history has involved the desires of elite groups in certain societies for ingredients and tastes that were considered ‘exotic’, and which could be deployed as means of class distinction. In all societies possessed of a complex enough division of labour and social structure to allow strong differentiation of the lifestyles of elites and lower groups, **there exists a cuisine of the elite and a cuisine ‘of the people’**. While the latter is characterized by the geographical proximity of its staple ingredients to the places of habitation of peasants and urban lower orders, **elite cuisine is often marked by the fact that at least some of its ingredients come from places that are (or are regarded as being) far-flung and distant**. This is especially the case with spices and other products used to flavour foodstuffs that may well be more ‘local’ in origin, spices and suchlike being relatively easy to transport in storage over long distances. Thus for Goody, while peasant cuisine speaks of *terroir* and (enforced) locality, **elite cuisine always has a potentially more ‘global’ element, involving the use of non-Indigenous materials to produce new, more hybrid food forms**.

A good case in point concerns the elite foodways of the Roman empire, the latter being a socio-political social order that bears certain similarities to present-day conditions of globality (Robertson and Inglis, 2004). At the peak of their empire’s power and geographical reach, **the Romans had fairly extensive trading links with south-east Africa, India, Malaysia, and even China**. Although such trade was generally operated by Indian

and Parthian middlemen, rather than by direct contact between Rome and these locales, nonetheless there was a **steady movement of goods, both more mundane and more luxurious, including spices and other kinds of foodstuff that could be kept for several months** (Curtin, 1998). Such trade both made possible and further stimulated Roman elites' appetites for the exotic in food tastes. Culinary fashion among the upper classes was pithily characterized by the satirist Petronius (1996: 89) in this manner: 'Far-out and foreign win/What's out-of-bounds is in'. In like fashion, the philosopher Seneca (1889: 334–5) castigated those of his contemporaries 'whose luxury transcends the bounds of an empire which is already perilously wide'. Seneca went on to deride those who would only eat shell-fish if they knew it came 'from the unknown shore of the farthest sea', that is to say Britain, one of the ends of the earth in the Roman imagination. Such finicky epicures demanded that there be brought

... from all regions everything, known or unknown, to tempt their fastidious palate: food, which their stomach, worn out with delicacies, can scarcely retain, is brought from the most distant ocean ... they do not even deign to digest the banquets which they ransack the globe to obtain ... they wander through all countries, cross the seas and excite at a great cost the hunger which they might allay at a small one.
(Seneca, 1889: 334–5)

From this point of view, elite Roman epicures and gastronomes had gone too far, in both geographical, moral and gustatory terms, in search of exquisite sweetmeats from every conceivable part of the world (Miller, 1969), the edible and the moral having a strong connection in this culture as in many (perhaps all) others throughout history (see Levi-Strauss, 1965, Korsmeyer, 1999).

The search for ample sources of spices was not restricted to the Romans of the imperial period. **The cuisine of Medieval European elites was also heavily spice-driven, with both sweet and savoury tastes being based around the judicious spicing of particular dishes.** In a medieval aristocratic feast, one might find such flavours as 'grains of paradise' (*Aframomum melegueta*, of the cardamom family) from Africa, nutmeg and cloves from the Moluccas, **cinnamon from Ceylon, ginger from China and pepper from southern India** (Colquhoun, 2007; Turner, 2005). By the **thirteenth century, sugar began to appear in Europe from the Middle East, and had started to replace honey as a sweetener in the elite diets.** As Colquhoun (2007: 54) notes, by the time such products arrived in Western Europe, 'they had passed through so many traders' hands that few really knew where they came from'. But despite the lack of knowledge as to the places of origin of such flavourings, they remained central to the taste culture of elites, the latter involving 'a juxtaposition of the piquant with sweet fruits, nuts and sugars' (Colquhoun, 2007: 54). While the advent of 'fusion' cuisines is sometimes presented as a development in the West of very recent provenance (James, 1996), medieval elite cooking stands as testament to a period prior to the construction of allegedly pure and exclusive 'national' cuisines, a time when food tastes were shared by elites across large swathes of Europe, and when the use of 'exotic' ingredients was as much the norm as it is in the period of, for example, the 'Pacific Rim' hybrid cuisine to be found in the restaurants of present-day Sydney and San Francisco (Gallegos, 2005).

Processes to do with what we today call globalization have arguably been going on since the dawn of humanity, when early humans slowly spread out from their originary location in East Africa throughout all the continents. Likewise, the cultivation of grains,

one of the basic foodstuffs that underpins human existence in most parts of the planet, stretches back to the start of settled agriculture in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys c. 7000 BCE. By around 5000 BCE, wheat and barley had spread into Africa and by 4000 BCE into Europe, widespread cultivation of grains leading to major deforestation between 3500 and 3000 BCE – an indication that human agricultural practices have been having major impacts on the natural environment for a very considerable period (Atkin, 1992). For much of human history, however, grains were not transported very far from their original place of production – for example, as recently as the sixteenth century CE, only 1 per cent of the total grain produced in the Mediterranean world was transported internationally (Braudel, 1982). Internationalized, and then globalized, grain production and distribution is primarily a product of the nineteenth century, stimulated at first by the repeal of the protectionist Corn Laws in the United Kingdom in the 1840s, with first the USA and Canada, then Australia, India, and Argentina becoming major grain exporting countries to many parts of the world in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Atkin, 1992: 18). The current global food crisis (see below) is in many ways structured by developments towards ‘grain globalization’ that occurred in the later Victorian period.

In many accounts of ‘modern’ globalization – globalization ‘proper’, as it were – the European ‘discovery’ of the Americas stands as the point at which the whole planet starts to become ‘one place’, even if such a place is characterized by fragmentation and centrifugal forces as much as by integration and centripetal tendencies (Scholte, 2000). In terms of the globalization of food, it is certainly possible to claim not only that the trans-Atlantic food transactions attendant upon the European colonization of the Americas marks the beginning of modern food globalization, but also that the ‘Columbian’ movement of foodstuffs, animals, plant-life, and people between the old world and the new world stands as one of the two most significant material and economic developments within modern food globalization, its consequences as wide-ranging and as disruptive of previous patterns of food cultivation, distribution, and consumption as are the effects of the globalized food regimes of the later twentieth century (Mintz, 2008). Many of the ingredients and tastes that have characterized European food cultures over the last five centuries originated in the Americas and were wholly unknown to Europeans before the conquerors brought them back to their mother countries. Without the expansion of the Spanish empire throughout the sixteenth century, we would not today be familiar with the tastes of either chocolate or peanuts, crops that are now grown in other parts of the world but which were once available only in the Americas (Rebora, 2001). Even more peculiar is the thought that the potato would probably not play such an important role in north European food cultures if it had not been brought back from South America by the means of European conquest (Fernandez-Armesto, 2001). In subsequent European history, allegedly ‘national’ food cultures were made possible by a collective forgetting of the originally non-Indigenous origins of certain foodstuffs. Thus nothing seems more essentially ‘Italian’ than the tomato, but it first came from the Americas, along with gnocchi (made from potatoes) and polenta (made from maize, another South American staple). In the same vein, one today associates chilli with the cooking of India and certain Far Eastern countries, yet they too are Indigenous to South America. A converse process of trans-Atlantic movement in foodstuffs also occurred in the post-Columbian period: from Europe and Africa to the Americas and the Caribbean came crops such as rice and bananas, and animals such as beef cattle. Nothing sounds more quintessentially ‘Mexican’ than chilli con carne, but as it involves either beef or rice, it is using ingredients that came to the Americas only in the last few hundred years.

The vast biotic movements of the post-Columbian period pay testament to the strongly globalizing tendencies of food production and consumption in the early modern period, making it possible to argue that early modernity was quite as ‘globalizing’ in this regard as was the twentieth century, and as is the twenty-first (Jardine, 1997). **But arguably a key difference between early modern and late modern food globalization is that in the former,** consciousness of novelty and exoticism in cuisine was soon replaced by processes of normalization, rendering the previously exotic into the known, the taken-for-granted and thus often part of supposedly ‘national’ cuisines; but in late modern conditions, novelty and exoticism are much more than hitherto more self-consciously imagined, reflected upon and deployed, as are their antitheses, locality, stability, and *terroir*. Early moderns did not subject foodstuffs and their alleged social consequences to the same degree of reflection, reflexivity, and contestation as do their late modern successors (Beck, 1992). Yet it remains the case that the Columbian transfusion of both things and ideas haunts the contemporary landscape of food, precisely insofar as late modern attempts to root the rootless, and to create ontologically secure horizons of consumption, are generally compelled to forget that what is represented – if not indeed fetishized – as truly ‘local’, ‘regional’ or ‘national’ is in fact the product of long-term processes of inter-continental movement, mobility and exchange, driven first by the forces of colonialism (Mintz, 1986) and then by those of corporate agri-capitalism, the latter being the very forces that advocates of locality in food see themselves as struggling against (Leitch, 2003).¹

Food globalization and risk society

Food globalization processes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries can only be properly understood if set against the background of the development of the industrialized agri-capitalist food system that has appeared over the last century or so (Friedmann, 1994). From the later nineteenth century onwards, this system has become ever more globe-spanning in reach, although its development in different parts of the world has been uneven and its effects far from being totally homogeneous (Watts and Goodman, 1997). In terms of the ongoing development of this system, key features include massive and rapid urbanization in Europe and North America, **leading to large urban populations needing to be fed; the diminishing social role of the peasantry; the transformation of farms into ever larger production units; the development of mass-market oriented agricultural and livestock production systems, tending towards the factory farm model; the application of innovative scientific knowledge, produced and utilized by new sorts of professional cadres, to both animals and crops, especially in terms of producing species that were particularly conducive to rapid and easily manipulated growth; the massification and rationalization of animal breeding techniques and slaughtering systems; the consolidation of nation-wide, and international, transportation systems, such as the development of globally standardized freight and cargo systems (Levinson, 2008); and the development of new modes of packing and preservation, such as industrial freezer systems, and large-scale canning operations (for an overview, see Sorj and Wilkinson, 1985).**

All of these innovations, mostly pioneered in Europe and North America, have come to have increasingly world-level ramifications and consequences, such that agriculture world-wide, in one way or another, has come to be affected and restructured in light of the dynamics of globalized agri-capitalism (Friedmann, 1994). At the very least, one can note that agriculture in the present day involves a globalized division of agricultural

labour and trans-national chains of production, distribution, and consumption, with the effect that crises in one part of the system can have huge consequences for other parts (Daviron and Ponte, 2005) – such a situation being one of the most important indices of an intricately connected system, as Durkheim (1964 [1893]) recognized more than a hundred years ago. While for most of the twentieth century, this world-spanning industrialized food system operated in relatively unreported ways, turning out its factory-farmed meats and mass-produced cereals in manners relatively closed to controversy, by the later twentieth century one of its key features seemed to be its crisis-prone tendencies, these latter being very much reported upon by the media (Fischler, 1999).

Thus at the time of writing (mid-2008), newspapers are full of reports of a ‘global food crisis’, this nomenclature itself capturing the manner in which in the present day it seems to be impossible to talk about food outside the terms set by discourses centred around notions of globalization and globality. The current crisis is depicted (see for example *The Economist*, 2008) as resulting from ‘butterfly effects’ in certain parts of the system that then have uncontrollable unintended consequences in other, geographically disparate, parts of the network. Thus, for example, food riots in countries all around the equator are said to be consequent on shortages in rice, cereals, and other basic foodstuffs; these shortages are in part due to such factors as rising demand in the developed world for certain crops, hitherto used primarily for human food consumption, to be used in bio-fuels, that have themselves been created to ease pressure on an ever more imperilled biosphere. Thus measures intended to resolve one set of problems – in this case, carbon emissions and global warming – in turn create other serious dilemmas, here hunger, deprivation and attendant political unrest, a situation of domino effects utterly characteristic of ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992). Likewise, pressure is put on global food systems as living standards in countries such as China, India, and Brazil rise due to rapid industrialization, the latter itself being seen to contribute massively to the environmental woes of the planet. As newly economically-enfranchised groups in such places demand what they think of as richer and more varied diets, further pressure is put on cereal crops, these now being diverted to the purpose of feeding intensively farmed animals, such cereals being the very crops that are now in short supply in some of the world’s poorest regions. Thus as the diets of some ‘improve’, the access of others to basic foodstuffs goes into freefall. A further factor here is that the gases created by the intensive farming of animals such as cows and pigs are seen to contribute to global warming, such that the increased appetite for meat amongst the planet’s ‘new middle classes’ is seen to be helping to undermine the very biosphere on which all life across the planet depends. Irony piles upon irony, as the material conditions of globalized agriculture seem to exhibit ever more contradictory impulses and tendencies, the future outcomes of these being easily susceptible to being represented by concerned (primarily Western) commentators in increasingly apocalyptic terms (e.g. Kimbrell, 2002).

One feature of the world agri-capitalist system that makes it particularly open to being analyzed as part of ‘risk society’ is that, as it ever more displays – and crucially, is *perceived* by a wide range of different actors and groups as featuring – crisis tendencies, it also seems to be unable to correct itself and to resolve the problems generated by the very nature of its own functioning. According to Ulrich Beck (1992), an essential corollary of a risk society situation is when the institutions of (industrialized, nation-state-centred) ‘first modernity’ produce consequences – such as environmental degradation and food shortages – that they cannot themselves deal with. While food production and consumption have never been more regulated than in the present day (Kjaernes et al., 2007),

the manners in which they are regulated are multiple, complex, overlapping, and often contradictory. Various types and levels of regulation, and the bodies that produce and (try to) enforce these, accompanied the development of large-scale food systems throughout the twentieth century. These include national governmental regulations; rules created by agri-capitalist organizations themselves in attempts to 'self-police' (or be seen so to do); international (and putatively 'global') agreements and treaties associated with organizations such as, in world trade, the WTO and GATT, and in international food policy, the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization; the morally-informed standards promoted by non-governmental, campaigning, and charitable organizations, such as Compassion in World Farming; and the procedures of trans-national economic-political bodies, the most wide-ranging to date being those of the European Union (Friedmann, 1994).

Because of the multifarious, multi-level nature of all these different regulative bodies and their respective codes, the world in the present day is far from having a unitary system of regulations and procedures in the realm of food. Consequently, when crises (are seen to) arise, the lack of coordination in both diagnoses of the problems and ways of dealing with them, is very marked. For example, the effects of recent outbreaks of avian flu on the world-wide chicken-rearing industry are potentially disastrous, but it is difficult to coordinate efforts to deal with the problem when, just at the level of state-based institutions, different national governments are members of different, rival trading blocs. As Beck (1998) himself has noted, institutions of 'first modernity' such as national governments are ill-equipped to deal with problems that are by their very nature trans-national and are no respecter of state boundaries. Even institutions that are putatively more geared towards dealing with trans-national problems in food, health, and related matters, such as the EU or UN, are often sclerotic and confused in their responses, in part because they are hamstrung by inter-governmental bickering and the pursuit of naked national self-interest, and by the recalcitrance of agri-business in the face of the prospect of falling profits.

In essence, the contemporary global food system is a quintessential feature of 'risk society' conditions because its industrialized methods of production and distribution are both seen to create a whole series of problems, environmental, moral and otherwise, as well as being highly susceptible to troubles – avian flu, 'mad cow disease', etc. – that are themselves always potentially 'global' in reach, as the dangers they create spiral uncontrollably down the networks of the globalized division of labour (Fischler, 1999). Moreover, as this system itself has both produced and has been subjected to an equally spiralling set of regulatory instruments, problems keep proliferating, not only because the regulative bodies struggle to regulate what they are supposed to regulate, and are very bad at coordinating their responses to crises, but also because – in Niklas Luhmann's (1996) terms – the more ways that exist of categorizing certain phenomena as problems, the more problems come to 'exist' that have to be dealt with. For example, thirty years ago, concerns about intensive factory farming were not a major factor for agri-business to deal with, as such practices very much occurred 'behind the scenes' and out of public view. But due to the successful moral-political entrepreneurship of animal rights groups in the developed world, such issues are now very much in the discursive terrain that shapes perceptions of, and increasingly forms part of, globalized systems of food production, with practices hitherto deemed unproblematic – such as keeping large numbers of animals in very small spaces – now regarded as deeply problematic (Nibert, 2002). As animal rights discourses, and analogous concerns about the ethics and social and biotic consequences of genetic modification of plant and animal life, have become part of the

discursive elements of globalized food production, new problems have proliferated, as reality has been reconfigured in light of new sensibilities and moral concerns (Macnaghten, 2004).

It is also worth noting in this regard that not only do such problematizing discourses now exist in, and help to structure, world-level discursive space (Lechner and Boli, 2005), this being sphere of so-called 'global civil society' (Keane, 2003) that agri-business increasingly has to respond to and to at least pay lip-service to; but it is also the case that animal rights and anti-biotechnology groups have themselves become trans-national in their practices and modes of organization. For example, Lien (2004) has shown how trans-nationally active campaign groups have successfully created new food taboos, encouraging people in different countries to reject the attempted defining by the meat industry of certain animals, such as kangaroos, as fit for human consumption. Just as food production systems have become more trans-nationalized, so too have certain food prohibitions, the latter now longer the preserve of the anthropologist who studies food avoidances within, and solely as the products of, the tight-knit confines of small-scale communities (Douglas, 1966; Levi-Strauss, 1965). Thus food taboos have 'gone global' at the same time as a globalized food industry tries to serve up ever new forms of commodifiable comestible on the dining tables of the world.

Under risk society conditions, one would not only expect contestation by various social groups of industrial-capitalist practices, one would also expect the undermining of the bases of scientific authority, perhaps especially – given the moral freightedness of food noted above – in the realm of eating. It is not just the food industry which has experienced severe knocks in the developed world after such recent food chain crises as BSE ('mad cow disease'), foot-and-mouth outbreaks, and the reportedly carcinogenic nature of farmed salmon (Brown and Scott, 2004). It is also the claims to truth of scientists, both those working for governments and for private interests that have taken a battering in recent years. While the levels of public distrust in both the food industry and in food scientists varies from one national context to another (Kjaernes et al., 2007), it is certainly the case that scientific truth claims in the realm of food have never been more opened up to questioning than in the present day. Not only has there been an erosion of scientific authority, there is also a proliferation of different sorts of authorities, each clamouring for public recognition and attention. Different kinds of scientists each have their own sorts of claims, which may be contradictory of each other; different and changing forms of scientific advice are constantly appearing in the public arena; and other sorts of 'experts', among them those drawn from social movement organizations, pressure groups, corporate interests, and even celebrity culture (in the guise of celebrity chefs) all competing for air-time and recognition (Kjaernes et al., 2007).

This pluralization of food expertise certainly can undermine scientific authority in certain areas. For example, while the advocates of genetically modified (GM) crops such as spokespeople for the Monsanto company might have had in the 1970s a relatively easy time convincing public opinion as to the famine-eliminating capacities of this technology, their task in this regard is much more difficult in the present day, because increasing public skepticism towards, and uneasiness about, scientific claims, means that the views of anti-biotech campaigners may well be taken as seriously, if not more so, than those of industry representatives or those seen to be in the pay of corporate vested interests (Charles, 2001). Claims that GM foods, far from 'saving the planet' from the spectre of wide-spread famine in the developing world, in fact promote a corporate strangle-hold over world farmers in the developing world, by compelling them to buy seeds from monopoly-holding corporations that hold lucrative patents on whole strains of plants and

crops, may well be appealing to developed world publics that conceive of themselves as ‘responsible’ consumers and ethically-informed ‘global citizens’. Given the hold of these sorts of globally-oriented imaginaries on economically influential middle class groupings, the case of GM foodstuffs is particularly exemplary, insofar as while agri-business continues enthusiastically to embrace the ‘scientization’ of agriculture, such a process has now been subjected to deep and divisive contestation, with the eventual outcome of public debates on such matters being far from certain.

Certainly the whole arena of the globalized food system is nowadays best characterized by contradictions, paradoxes, and unintentional consequences with far-reaching and difficult-to-control effects, rather than any sense of smooth-running, uncontested operation. This can be seen in the fact that challenges to the scientization of industrialized food production, and thus to the knowledge base of global agri-business, themselves often have outcomes completely unintended by their advocates. Indeed, attempts to make the system both more ‘ethical’ and more centred around the production of ‘healthy’ food (as opposed to ‘junk food’, the new demon of global food imaginaries), may rebound on their progenitors. Thus as Clover (2006) reports, the high praise heaped on the health-giving properties of fish by nutritional scientists and various kinds of dietary entrepreneur, simultaneously encourages developed world consumers to shun apparently health threatening products like industrially-produced hamburgers, while pushing up consumption of a ‘virtuous’ (i.e. both health-giving and ‘slimming’) foodstuff like fish. But increased fish consumption is made possible by environmentally-damaging industrialized fishing, which damages ecosystems, threatens to wipe out certain piscine species, and which increasingly is based in the waters of poorer nations (e.g. on the west coast of Africa) whose governments are happy to take the money offered for fishing concessions by the EU and other developed world bodies, despite the environmental havoc that is wreaked on local fishing industries, and thus on local and national food systems more generally. Thus those products and practices that seem to developed world consumers to be environmentally sound may well be based on activities that are very far from being so – but what counts as environmentally sound is also a point of debate and dispute in the first place. If developed world consumers start to go beyond the pleasant-sounding rhetoric of ‘organic’ and Fairtrade food production, they may well find that the virtuous ‘food chain’ they thought they were part of is in fact a much more ambivalent phenomenon than they had thought, bearing more resemblance to the ‘mainstream’ agri-business practices they had thought they were rejecting and avoiding (Wright and Madrid, 2007). Middle class western consumers are now very much enamoured of the notion of ‘organic’ farming, but the actual practices of organic farmers are ambivalent, for as Guthman (2004) has shown there are many diverse motivations among farmers who participate in organic practices, ranging from environmental philosophy through to regarding organic production purely as a money-spinning enterprise. What may seem at first blush to be ethically progressive practices can be revealed to be more complex and multitudinous than one may have imagined. If any one phrase can be said to depict world food systems under conditions of globalization and endemic risk-generation, then that phrase is most likely ‘deep ambivalence’.

McDonaldization and its others

A very simplistic account of food globalization would have it that this process involved solely the world-wide spread of the great American food brands – Coca-Cola, Pepsi,

Kentucky Fried Chicken, Burger King and so on – which allegedly totally eliminate ‘local’ cuisines and foodways in their all-conquering path. Of all of these brands, none has been subjected to more critique in academic circles, and vilification in activist circles than the hamburger chain McDonald’s. Growing from one single outlet in San Bernardino, California in 1948, it had spread to 117 countries world-wide, with a new branch opening somewhere in the world in the mid-1990s *every eight hours* (although this boom had subsided by the first few years of the 21st century – see Watson and Caldwell, 2005: 2). **Just as certain foodstuffs can take on great symbolic valence in certain socio-cultural contexts, so too has McDonald’s been defined as the great symbol of American-led cultural globalization, going hand in hand with the other products of American ‘cultural imperialism’, such as Hollywood films and television, and Nike sports-gear** (Tomlinson, 1997). Symptomatic of such trends is the great success and widespread dissemination of the argument of the American author Benjamin Barber (1992) that the early twenty-first century is characterized by an epic clash between ‘Jihad’ (localizing religious and ethnic fundamentalism and separatisms) on the one side, and McWorld (the globalizing institutions of Western corporate capitalism) on the other. That McDonald’s can seem plausibly to lend its name to a whole ‘world’ – or, more specifically, a whole world-view – speaks for its great symbolic power in the present day. Future historians may well look back in some wonderment at how widespread in our own epoch the association was between fears as to the damage wrought by a certain kind of cultural globalization on the one hand, and, of all things, a particular chain of fast-food outlets on the other.

In addition to Barber’s ideas, one of the most influential contributions to the defining of McDonald’s as somehow emblematic of present-day world-wide social, cultural, and economic conditions, is the work of the American sociologist George Ritzer.² For Ritzer (2000), the four cardinal features of the **McDonald’s approach to food production, preparation and serving are efficiency, calculation, predictability, and control**. Every single aspect of food consumption is strictly regulated according to fine-grained calibrations, from the **weight and size of the burgers** (wholly standardized), to the methods of assembling them in restaurants (according to the same principles as the Fordist production line), to the **regulation of staff** (all having been trained in exactly the same manner) and **the control of the customers** (uncomfortable seating in the restaurants being deliberately designed to prevent consumers from lingering, freeing up space for the next wave of customers). Ritzer defines the process of McDonaldization as ‘the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world’ (2000: 1). Thus the definition implies not only that the four cardinal principles come to effect how things are organized in ever more sectors of the developed world (for example labour in call-centres), but also that in the sector of food production and consumption, those principles will become ever more important in all parts of the globe. Even if it is not the McDonald’s brand itself which is the avatar of such developments, nonetheless it is these principles that are very likely to structure increasingly food production and consumption world-wide.

In this sense, the symbolic efficacy of McDonald’s rests particularly in the fact that it has provided a template for hyper-rationalization that is alleged to be geographically and culturally unstoppable. In later work, Ritzer (2004) has argued that globalization processes are in essence the world-wide spreading of ‘culturally weightless’ products, such as credit cards. These sorts of products have no specific cultural designations, and are thus easily transported and introduced into any milieu as they do not really ‘mean’ anything. This raises an important issue relating to the products of McDonald’s. Should they be

seen primarily as culinary embodiments of ‘American culture’ (a problematic term in its own right) or as devoid of any specific cultural colouring and connotations? This is not just an analytic issue, it is a political one too, for deciding one way or the other in this regard is very much implicated in broader decisions as to what one’s orientations towards globalization processes *are*. If one thinks that McDonald’s is primarily a symbol of American-led cultural imperialism, then one is committing oneself, at least implicitly, to a certain kind of ‘anti-globalization’ politics. One of the contemporary hero figures of this kind of politics, possessed of a media profile now stretching far beyond the borders of his homeland, is the French farmer José Bové, who famously bulldozed a branch of McDonald’s France in protest at what he saw as the degradation of French culture in general, and food culture in particular, by creeping Americanization (Bové et al., 2002). Conversely, if one regards McDonald’s as signifying and representing precisely (in Ritzer’s phrasing) ‘nothing’, then McDonaldization is certainly not equivalent to Americanization, cultural imperialism or the destruction of allegedly ‘traditional’ and ancient foodways. Rather, it can be seen as a rationalization process – or set of processes – the results of which on particular socio-cultural contexts are open-ended and contingent, rather than wholly predictable and set in stone.

Much of the academic discussion on such matters has focused on the spaces within the McDonald’s restaurants themselves. Such locales are very easily placed under the rubric of what the French anthropologist Marc Augé (1995) calls ‘non-places’, that is decontextualized and deterritorialized locales like the international hotel conference suite and the departure lounges and duty-free stores of large airports world-wide. After all, a McDonald’s restaurant in Dayton, Ohio, has – or is supposed to have – the same sort of layout as an equivalent outlet in Frankfurt, Mumbai, and Taipei. If looking at such matters through the lens of cultural imperialism, then such locales are construable as places where the local people, especially the youth, are inculcated into a ‘foreign’ food culture that weans them away from ‘Indigenous’ foodways.

Much the same could be said of another phenomenon of the last fifteen years or so, namely the spread of American or American-style coffee shop chains, the foremost amongst which is Starbucks, to many of the more wealthy countries of the world, being enthusiastically embraced in particular by younger, socially aspirant groups. A recent noteworthy issue here is the increasing popularity of Starbucks amongst younger socially mobile groups in the People’s Republic of China, ‘hanging out’ in Starbucks being regarded locally as a very cool thing to do (Harrison et al., 2005). Simpson’s (2008) study of the development of Starbucks and similar chains in Macau after the Portuguese handing back that territory to the Chinese government in 1999, suggests that over time more collectivist modes of drinking and eating were significantly eroded as more and more middle class people started to structure their daily routines around coffee shops, and more individualistic practices were encouraged, especially those centred around a display of lifestyle aspirations.

Such studies do indeed suggest that quotidian routines can be restructured by restaurant and coffee shop spaces, with concomitant effects on identities and performances of self. However, if one looks at the themes raised by Augé (1995) in a different way, and regards both the space of the burger restaurant or coffee shop itself and the products purveyed within it, as being without any intrinsic meaning in and of themselves, as relatively blank backdrops against which the activities of everyday life are played out, then other possibilities open up. Regarded in this manner, it is possible either that eating at McDonald’s or drinking at Starbucks have little or no effects on ‘local’ cultural practices, or conversely that the literally meaningless space and foodstuffs can be semiotically

colonized by 'local' cultural practices themselves (bearing in mind that 'local' can only ever be a very relative term, especially under conditions of endemic globality).

A great deal of ethnographic work was carried out by anthropologists and cognate others in the 1990s, against the background of the spread of McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken and other such outlets to the former Soviet Bloc and a China rapidly embracing a capitalist economy (Watson, 1997; Miller, 1998; Caldwell, 2004; Lozado, 2005). One of the key animating reasons behind such work was to subject to criticism what these authors took to be the often glib assertions, unencumbered by much in the way of empirical evidence, of authors writing within the cultural imperialism tradition (see e.g. Miller, 1998). Ethnographic studies of customer activities within McDonald's and similar locations in places like Moscow and Beijing stressed that far from fundamentally restructuring symbolic and material practices, once fast food restaurants had lost the glitter of novelty and had become part of everyday life, they were wholly appropriated into the patterns of quotidian existence that had existed before their arrival on the social scene. Tomlinson (1997: 87) summarizes these claims thus:

In everyday activities like working, eating or shopping, people are likely to be concerned with their immediate needs – their state of health, their family and personal relations, their finances and so on. In these circumstances the cultural significance of working for a multinational, eating lunch at McDonald's, shopping for Levis, is unlikely to be interpreted as a threat to national identity, but how these mesh with the meaningful realm of the private: McDonald's as convenient for the children's birthday party; jeans as a dress code for leisure-time activities [and so on].

Thus on this view, apocalyptic and unsubstantiated claims as to the fundamental restructuring of symbolic systems and modes of action by 'McDonaldization' and related phenomena have to be dropped in favour of studies of really occurring practices within fast-food locales.

The ethnographic studies mentioned above are themselves not above criticism. They sometimes exhibit tendencies towards assuming that 'local' and 'national' food-related habits and ways of thinking, as enacted in everyday contexts and locations, not only are relatively homogeneous in the first place, but are sufficiently robust to 'withstand' any alleged colonization by Western fast food influences. Thus just as cultural imperialism arguments tend to assume the 'destructive', disenchanting effects of McDonaldization and related processes, some of the ethnographic writings are suffused with romanticizing assumptions about the homogeneity and ongoing vitality of what are taken to be local and national ways of eating. Both positions are open to question, precisely insofar as tacit *a priori* value-orientations are unreflectively incorporated into the analyses being proffered.

Where ethnographic critics of cultural imperialism arguments are on stronger ground concerns their scepticism towards the latter's framing of food globalization issues such that local and national foodways are seen to be under wholly unprecedented threat in the present day by the forces of global food homogenization. Consideration of historical sources reveals that fears as to the adulteration, if not downright destruction, of national and local cuisines by non-Indigenous influences have been around for at least a century in western countries themselves. Thus in George Gissing's novel of 1903 *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, nothing upsets the eponymous hero more than the sight of foreign butter in English shop windows. 'This is the kind of thing that makes one gloom over the prospects of England. The deterioration of English butter is one of the worst

signs of the moral state of our people' (Gissing, 1987: 152). Just as at a later date Roland Barthes (1993 [1957]) noticed the huge significance that beef-steak could have for symbolizing healthy and vigorous Frenchness, so here does butter take on the burden of signifying both Englishness and threats to the moral and spiritual health of the nation. Likewise, across the Channel after World War I

... Frenchmen began to feel that the unprecedented influx of foreign tourists hurrying through the country in fast cars, Riviera or Biarritz bound, not caring what they ate or drank so long as they were not delayed on their way, was threatening the character of their cookery far more than had the shortages and privations of war. Soon, they felt, the old inns and country restaurants would disappear and there would be only modern hotels serving mass produced, impersonal food which could be put before the customers at a moment's notice, devoured, paid for, and instantly forgotten.

(David, 1970 [1960]: 6)

Thus worries as to the advent of 'mass produced, impersonal food' served in hyper-modern non-spaces are not just a feature of contemporary France, but have been around in that country for some time (Fantasia, 1995). While the French intelligentsia may fret about what they see as the disastrous overturning of national culinary patrimony by the forces of American-led globalization, they seem to have forgotten that they are playing out a script which was written at least ninety years before, and which has been a recurring feature of French engagements with (perceived) modernity (Ross, 1996).

Lest it be thought that such matters are peculiar to France, it is worth noting that the same notions have haunted the imaginations of other European elites over the same period. Thus at the very same time, the mid-1920s, that the first pan-Greek cookery books were being written, which codified for the first time what were to be taken as quintessentially 'Greek' ingredients, flavours and means of preparation, it was also the case that Greek intellectuals depicted foodways as a key area of Greek culture that was 'in danger of being swept away by the onslaught of a cosmopolitan modernity' (Peckham, 1998: 173; see also Appadurai, 1988, for the creation in the mid-1980s of the first 'Indian' cookbooks in India). The two processes mentioned here are intimately connected: perceived threats to what are taken as 'authentically national' food habits – in this case, the threats posed by the first appearance in Greece of American- and British-style canned foods – compel authors to compile what is presented as the national culinary heritage; but once that heritage has been identified, the apparent threats to it loom ever larger in the collective imaginary, provoking further, ever more fraught attempts to freeze in time what is taken as the 'pure essence' of national food culture.

Given the rather fraught and febrile relationships that can pertain between particular national intelligentsias on the one hand, and both imagined 'national' and perceived 'global' food cultures on the other, it comes as little surprise to find that the cultural criticism and social theory that flows from the pens of intellectuals should often embody and express the kinds of fears as to culinary adulteration mentioned above. In a now famous passage from the late 1950s, the English cultural critic (and foundational figure in cultural studies) Richard Hoggart (1962 [1957]) took the new methods of serving milk to youth (in the 'non-spaces' of the new, self-consciously US-style 'milk bars') as a telling index of the alleged Americanization of Britain. Drawing an explicit comparison with the 'traditional' space and associated mores of the 'local pub', Hoggart (1962 [1957]: 248) presents the milk bar in this way:

Compared with the pub around the corner, this is all a peculiarly thin and pallid form of dissipation, a sort of spiritual dry-rot amid the odour of boiled milk. Many of the customers – their clothes, their hair-styles, their facial expressions all indicate – are living to a large extent in a myth world compounded of a few simple elements which they take to be those of American life.

Reading Hoggart's text more than fifty years after its writing, the nostalgic yearning for the past expressed within it is quite obvious, the 'pub around the corner' taken as the hallmark of a life-world vanishing before one's eyes. But the nostalgia was very likely not apparent to Hoggart at the time, or the many members of the English intelligentsia of the period who shared similar sorts of feelings, and who would also have taken food and drink as a key barometer of the kinds of social and cultural changes they feared and despised (Williams, 1958). Writings of the present day that see McDonaldization and related phenomena in a wholly hostile light risk smuggling into their analyses of contemporary conditions the sorts of nostalgia that we can now see having underpinned, and in some ways having undercut, the writings of Hoggart and his contemporaries. But equally well, accounts which stress the apparent robustness of local and national food habits in the face of putatively globally homogenizing culinary forces, risk indulging in a glib denial of the ways in which the latter may well be restructuring, albeit in indirect and subtle fashions, how and why people in different parts of the world eat as they do, and how they think about such practices.

Towards heterogenization?

However debates about McDonaldization and related matters play out in the future, it is clear that the globalization of food in the present day has to be construed in terms of dialectical, contradictory relationships between forces of homogenization (or forces that are perceived to be such by specific groups of actors) and forces of heterogenization (or forces that are also perceived as such by actors). Any adequate account of food globalization must take on board the fact that when particular phenomena are perceived as both homogenizing, threatening and potentially destructive by certain groups of people, those people may very likely engage in projects, that may be more or less self-conscious in nature, which stress the values either of cultural heterogeneity or of cultural purity. As Manuel Castells (1997: 2) argues, when people in particular parts of the world feel threatened by the apparently homogenizing forces of (what is taken as) 'globalization', they may well turn towards 'expressions of collective identity that challenge globalization ... on behalf of cultural singularity and people's control over their lives and environment[s]'. Far from destroying more local and specific senses of belonging, identity and affiliation, globalization processes may actually help not only to reinvigorate these, but in actual fact to create them.

Both of the possibilities just mentioned – the assertion either of cultural heterogeneity against perceived global homogenization, or of cultural purity against the eradication of perceived national and local cultures – can be identified in the case of food and foodways. In both cases, when actors in the developed world cast the role of the villains in their dramas of contemporary culinary purity and impurity, they tend to select McDonald's and other global fast food chains on the one hand, and the large supermarket companies on the other, with capitalist agri-business as another nefarious entity lurking in the background (Blythman, 2005). McDonald's and similar corporations stand charged with

various sins, from their complicity in ethically-dubious factory farming practices, through to the severe exploitation of employees and the promotion of unhealthy, obesity-inducing diets among the population at large, especially children (Brook, 2005). Likewise, the large supermarket groups like Tesco and Wal-Mart are accused of promoting unsustainable agricultural practices, of holding farmers in many different countries to ransom through the means of their de facto monopolies in various markets, and of being wholly environmentally unsound, through means such as using unnecessary and un-recyclable packaging, and distributing food by plane transport which helps to increase world carbon emissions (Murray, 2007).

Particularly in the last decade or so, a notable feature of public discourse about food in the developed world has been the rise and subsequent ubiquity of critiques of fast food outlets and supermarkets, both in book form (for example Schlosser, 2001; Blythman, 2005) and in cinema-released documentaries (for example Spurlock, 2004). Thus critique of alleged food homogenization, and the claimed deleterious social, cultural, and medical effects thereof, has become an important element of the food system itself, insofar as the various large corporations that are under attack have had to deal with the barrage of criticisms in various ways, either in terms of public relations campaigns and rebranding exercises, or more substantively in terms of changes in the nature of the actual goods being offered for consumption. The recent, rather fraught attempts by McDonald's to present itself as being an enemy of childhood obesity and a friend of healthy diets is a good case in point, increasing claims as to the company being in significant part responsible for obesity in children not only in the developed world but also in new markets like China, forcing company executives to try to take fast remedial action (Cheng, 2004). While relatively uncommon as late as the 1980s (Humphery, 1998), bad publicity and taking action to deal with it, is now as much a part of globalized food systems as are advertising campaigns and customer promotions.

A further effect of the plethora of critical books, articles, television programmes, and films indicting the fast food companies, supermarkets, and agribusiness that have appeared in recent years, is to put into broad public circulation the sorts of fears as to the homogenization of food and the loss of national and local food habits, that hitherto have often been mainly the province of relatively small intellectual and elite groups. For example, a substantial part of prime-time programming on the UK's mainstream commercial television channel Channel 4 in 2007 was devoted to polemical documentaries indicting such phenomena as childhood obesity, unethical factory farming, and exploitation of developing world workers by the large fast food and supermarket corporations, to the extent that it sometimes seemed as if a certain wing of television production was waging systematic rhetorical warfare against the latter. Within such a mediated cultural climate, it is likely that a much wider demographic spread of people, beyond the confines of the intelligentsia, will increasingly be influenced by ways of thinking that stress the threats of supposed food homogenization and degradation. This in turn increases the likelihood of a proliferation of projects to promote either heterogenization or alleged cultural purity in food (Boyle, 2004).

Yet various ironies are at play here. One is that it is the large supermarkets themselves which have to a large extent been responsible for certain types of culinary heterogenization in the countries of the developed world. In the terms set out by Allison James (1996), one notable feature of food globalization in a country such as contemporary Britain is the *mass production of 'foreign' food*. In the 1950s, the food writer Elizabeth David encountered great resistance to her attempts to introduce 'Mediterranean' textures and flavours into the domestic repertoire of British cookery (McLean, 2004). Yet now what

are taken to be ‘typically’ southern Italian, southern French, Spanish, Greek, Indian, Mexican, Chinese, and Thai ingredients and recipes are available in every supermarket, as well as on every high street (Warde et al., 1999). As the large supermarket chains from the 1960s onwards both reflected, and themselves cultivated, changing public attitudes towards food, more and more items that had previously been regarded as queer and exotic became indigenized and familiar. A report published in 2004 by the major UK supermarket chain Sainsbury’s indicated that while sales of ‘traditional British’ dishes such as shepherd’s pie and chicken casserole were in terminal decline, there seemed to be an undimmed appetite among consumers of all classes for meals that are presented as Indian and Chinese in origin, with Mexican food coming in close behind. The report concluded that by the year 2034, it was unlikely that more than one out of four meals eaten in Britain would involve ‘traditionally British’ dishes like steak and kidney pie or sausages and mash. Instead, the supermarket’s researchers concluded that flavours and ingredients from as far afield as Japan, North Africa, and Peru would by that time have become familiar parts of the British culinary scene (Sayid, 2004). **The lesson to be drawn here is that supermarkets are very happy to promote apparent heterogenization in tastes, even if the underlying material substructure of production and distribution that they have developed is best understood as primarily homogenizing in nature.**

A further irony emerges if we consider the development of another, related phenomenon, namely what James dubs the *connoisseurship of national cuisines*. Involving in an often relatively self-conscious manner the threats of homogenization posed by fast food companies and supermarkets, are counter-trends towards defining and defending the parameters of particular ‘national’ and ‘regional’ cuisines. In these cases, certain interested parties claim to have found the essence of a particular cuisine, be it associated with a nation, a region, or a particular ethnic or other sort of group. A whole sub-field of the publishing industry has sprung up to cater for this market, selling cookbooks that claim to present the ‘real Andalusia’ or the ‘true taste of Provence’ (Boyle, 2004). Here there is a concerted effort not only to capture the ‘essence’ of each particular cuisine, the culinary *Volksgeist* assumed by nineteenth century commentators, but also to police what are acceptable or unacceptable versions of particular dishes. In the present day, a whole series of culinary entrepreneurs – cookbook authors, food journalists, television food programme hosts, and so on – are all concerned to dictate what is ‘authentic’ in a cuisine and what is not, even if such authenticity is ‘performed’ rather than ‘real’ in the manner its advocates claim (Lu and Fine, 1995). A particularly striking example of these trends is the ‘Slow Food’ movement, which sprang up in northern Italy in the 1980s as a social movement of the intelligentsia, dedicated to ‘saving’ both local cuisine and eating habits from the perceived destructive effects of food globalization (Leitch, 2003). Ironically, given the success of the movement amongst a primarily middle class audience in Italy and beyond, the movement is now itself trans-national, having active branches across the developed world including the ‘great Satan’ of food homogenization itself, the USA. This situation presents the paradoxical sight of a movement dedicated to the preservation of the so-called ‘national’ and ‘local’ in food that is itself trans-national in reach and organization. This mirrors the trans-nationalization of groups dedicated to other related causes such as organic food production (itself imbued with various romantic discourses concerned with locality) and Fair Trade distribution (Wright and Madrid, 2007). The apparently ‘local’ struggles against the negatively-conceived ‘global’ in food terms have themselves become in significant part globalized, paying testimony to the spiralling ironies that have become inherent in this sphere of human affairs (Leitch, 2003).

A further irony worth mentioning here is that in France, one of the territories most open to the ideas associated with ‘Slow Food’ ideas, politicians are keen to pay lip service to the need to protect small farmers – and by extension, the culture of *la France profonde* – against the perceived ravages of large-scale agri-capitalism and its avatars, such as the use of genetically-modified crops. However, France is not only one of the world’s leading countries for agri-business, being the second largest food exporter in the world (after the USA) and producing almost as much wheat as both Australia and Canada together (Lichfield, 1999); it also has had successive governments that have been very friendly both to agri-business and the genetic modification of crops (Kurzer and Cooper, 2007), even if the domestic media representation of such matters tends to suggest the opposite (Rosenthal, 2008). While French consumers may still pretend that they rarely or never eat in McDonald’s and suchlike outlets (Rifkind, 2008), it remains the case that the material sub-structure of French farming has relatively little to do with the kinds of practices associated with Slow Food, such that the latter can be regarded as a comforting patina of nostalgia placed on top of a highly rationalized, globally important agricultural economy.

Within the rhetoric of the Slow Food movement and related groups, ‘hybrid’ culinary forms are often disparaged, with trendy fusion cuisines particularly held up to ridicule (Petrini, 2003). But what this sort of culinary policing conveniently forgets is that, as we saw above in the case of post-Columbian movements of people, animals, and plant species, many of the cuisines that have apparently been untouched since the mists of time are themselves hybrids, created as the result of long-term processes of migration and trade. Up until the later nineteenth century, the period of the beginnings of world-level systems of food production and distribution, there were few compelling reasons to focus upon the ‘purity’ or otherwise of a given cuisine. But in the present time, characterized by public discourses focused around the alleged cultural and health disasters attendant upon food homogenization, there exists more and more need to draw demarcation lines around ‘true’ expressions of a food culture, and to identify and condemn what are seen as mere ersatz imitations of them and as hybridized deviations from the alleged norm. The *reclaiming* of the ‘local’ or ‘regional’ in food as often as not involves actually *reinventing* it. One might, for example, think that artisanally produced (that is non-mass production) pasta is a key part of ancient southern Italian food culture. But pasta only became widespread in the region in the eighteenth century, hardly a period long enough away from our own to count as ‘ancient’ (Serventi and Sabban, 2003). In a world-condition characterized for many people by perceived flux, movement, and uncertainty, cultures that seem authentic can be a source of much comfort, of much-needed ontological security in a universe of endless contingency (Giddens, 1991). If that is so, then the taste of a ‘traditional dish’, served in a comfortingly ‘local’ milieu, accompanied by the signifiers of hundreds of years of culinary heritage, the latter itself both embedded within and pointing towards a broader history of social and cultural continuity rather than change, can provide powerful symbolic resources in a world highly globalizing and globalized, beliefs in tradition and heritage, in cuisine as in anything else, being perhaps a socially necessary form of individual and collective self-delusion at the present time (Ray, 2004).

Conclusion

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the dictum of the nineteenth-century chef and food writer Alexis Soyer – ‘tell me what thou eatest, and I will tell thee who thou

art' – remains true, but not necessarily in the ways that Soyer had in mind nearly a hundred and fifty years ago. As we have seen, at that point in time, the world seemed naturally to resemble a culinary mosaic, even if that mosaic had in part been created by large-scale processes of migration and trade, and the post-Columbian transmission of food products and ideas across large stretches of the globe. Analogous forms of forgetting the trans-national social and historical origins of cuisines pertains in the present day, but the effects of today's culinary amnesias are much more politicized and fraught than they were in Soyer's time. Today globalized and crisis-ridden industrialized food systems, and key actors within them such as supermarkets and fast food chains, stimulate a range of responses to their perceived homogenizing effects, ranging from environmental and ethical protests, to the creation of new forms of culinary 'tradition' and the expression of claims to authenticity and purity in cuisine. Food globalization processes are simultaneously deeply material and highly symbolic, involving and generating a range of forms of action, thought and imagination that are simultaneously 'local' and 'global' in nature. The dynamics of food globalization are not only intricate and often unpredictable, they also point to – and in fact, create – many of the contradictions of an epoch in human affairs marked by endemic globality. For that reason alone, they should be given more serious attention in 'mainstream' literature and debates on globalization matters than they have perhaps hitherto enjoyed.

Notes

- 1 This is a point already made by Marx, in the context of his critique of Feuerbach in *The German Ideology*. Feuerbach's materialism had given the example of a cherry tree in a garden as something essentially 'real', the kind of real object that the idealising philosophy of the time could not grasp in its essential materiality. But Marx argues that Feuerbach

... does not see that the sensory world which surrounds him is not something immediately given from eternity, something always the same, but the product of industry and the social situation, in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole series of generations, each one standing on the shoulders of those preceding it, developing previous industry and forms of social intercourse, and changing their social order in accordance with changed needs. Even the objects of the simplest 'sensory certainty' are given through social development, industry and commercial relations. The cherry tree like almost all fruit trees was transplanted to our zone, as is well known, through *commerce*; it was only *by virtue of* this action of a determinate society at a determinate time that it was given to 'the sensory certainty' of Feuerbach.

(Marx and Engels, 1975 [1845]: 39–40)

This is not a point that would appeal very much to advocates of 'local authenticity' in cuisine such as those associated with the 'Slow Food' movement.

- 2 Indeed one may note that it is probably significant that it has been two American authors who have been most prominent in diagnosing the alleged cultural consequences of the globalization processes associated with the trans-nationalization of their own country's cultural habits.

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