



ETHNOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS

Edited by
Leo Coleman

Food

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Introduction

Leo Coleman

Nobody, not even anthropologists or other researchers, can go without food, and it should be obvious that food is somehow part of any attempt to understand social life and relationships. After all, we eat whenever we get together with friends or relatives—food is almost always an excuse for, if not the primary reason for, a social gathering—and varieties of foods are among the first things that come to mind when we think about other cultures. This book offers a collection of essays about eating in the course of cultural research, focusing on what you learn when you sit down and share food with someone else—and it is always much more than how to prepare or enjoy particular foods. We recount the pleasures, perils, and benefits of dining and drinking with others as a conscientious and conscious practice in the systematic exercise of ethnographic field research.

There are few areas of social life where the ethnographer's experience is more immediate and embodied, and where cultural learning requires more commitment, than eating. Food is the first medium through which each person, as an infant, learns to create and manage relationships with the outer world and the other people who populate it. These early experiences create tastes, customs, and habits, durable and hard to shake, which are the basis for our understanding or judgment of others' equally personal, and equally shaped, tastes. Because of this deeply engrained quality of tastes, food is also a cultural object, a thing we constantly alter and use to make new relationships. To be technical about it, both "cuisines"—products of long experimentation with the basic material of our sustenance—and "commensality"—structured ways of eating together or refusing to do so—offer some of the most important cultural arenas where we can learn about others, by experiencing how they communicate with each other by tasting, sharing, haggling over, or rejecting food.

Food: Ethnographic Encounters includes essays from widely varying parts of the world that focus on first-hand experiences of producing, procuring, cooking, eating, and sharing food in the course of learning about others and their lives.

Each essay recounts an individual researcher's fieldwork experience, usually in a part of the world that is not initially familiar to him or her, and often in pursuit of research questions that did not at first include food or eating as primary objects of interest. These essays explore the pleasures and perils of ethnography as an embodied, long-term engagement with other people where *they* live, with a special focus on how and what we learn when we cook and dine with others. But equally, these essays provide, individually and collectively, insights into the diversity and meaningfulness of food cultures in places ranging from South East Asia (Vietnam, Laos, Hong Kong) and the Pacific Islands to the Brazilian Amazon, by way of Georgia, in Central Asia, Yemen, Morocco, Kenya, and cities in Europe, including Vienna and Paris.

It should be noted at the outset that this volume is neither a comprehensive survey, thematic or geographical, of food cultures, nor of issues current in the broad field known as "food studies"—a vibrant field of research and writing in contemporary anthropology and related disciplines. There are many collections and monographs that address food and culture (Counihan and Van Esterik 2008), or the "cultural politics of food and eating" (Watson and Caldwell 2005), and much existing work on topics such as food and memory, industrialization of food production, and consumption and its contexts—from the kitchen to restaurants, with associated gendered and class-related meanings. Each topic could fill many volumes (and does—see the "Guide for Further Reading"). Meanwhile, researchers in nutritional anthropology creatively combine biological, sociological, and cultural approaches to food and eating, while folklore has always seen food as a special domain of talk, meaning-making, and storytelling (see Jones 2007). It is exemplary of the diversity and curiousness of anthropology as a discipline that no single "field" or "anthropology of food" can bound the range of interests that food attracts (fields, boundaries, and ranges, of course, all being food-related metaphors).

Across these essays we offer considerations of a number of topics important to the study of food in culture, politics, and contemporary global realities, but the essays dwell on the negotiation of different cuisines and systems of provisioning, delightful discoveries of new tastes and the exacting tasks of learning to cook with different techniques and tools, as well as painful experiences of food-borne illnesses and unpleasant reactions to unfamiliar tastes (both those of the ethnographers and their friends and family in fieldwork). They examine struggles over household tasks such as cooking, shared efforts to get food in insecure contexts, and the constant tasks of raising, processing, and eating food in the course of fieldwork and in the course of everyday life. In the range of ideas, contexts, and cultures encountered here, these essays reflect the breadth of ethnographic inquiry, while collectively they aim to demonstrate the particular methodological and substantive gains of doing ethnography—both as research and as a way of writing—from a basis in interpersonal experiences and encounters.

That is to say, this volume aims to provide a point of entry both for those curious about ethnography as it is practiced today, the kinds of knowledge and insights it can produce into social life in general, as well as to offer contributions to the study of food and its role in both personal and political relationships.

What Is an Ethnography of Food?

Ethnography relies on an assortment of research methods, which is part of the reason it can be so hard to define. Indeed, of the terms that make up the title of this book, *Food: Ethnographic Encounters*, “ethnography” surely needs the most explanation. Ethnography, like cooking, is both systematic and exploratory (often in different measures, depending on the kind of project being pursued). Ethnographers seek to find answers to research questions in everyday social life; questions such as: “How does industrial production change eating patterns?”; “Why does the price of different cheeses, or wines, vary so widely?”; or, more generally, “How does a national cuisine get invented?” Such questions can be framed and answered in a number of ways, and the research they support can be short-term, based on surveys and focused conversations (that might, for instance, collect remembered accounts of meals past). At the other end of the spectrum, ethnography can be a very long-term process, comprised of many return visits to a community, or a family, over years and even decades. Long- or medium-term research, which remains the gold standard for anthropologists, promises that research goals and orienting questions can be allowed to change over time, as more intimate and embodied knowledge is built up. Of whatever duration, ethnography in social and cultural anthropology always seeks to understand and explain both overt, discernible relations of cause and effect of the sort mentioned above, and also the underlying meanings, processes, and practices by which a whole pattern of human interaction is built up. This is not only a method that can be applied to discrete cultures (which only exist as abstractions), but indeed can be used to explore the cultural form and meaning of any social interaction, whether extended and mediated across great distances, or extremely local and of short duration.

Ethnography then is a process of research in which one actively seeks, learns, and shares cultural norms, habits, and meanings (whether at home or abroad). Ethnography in this sense is predicated on engagement in everyday habits and routines, and learning to discern important meanings and to communicate effectively in daily contexts (a process which is necessary even if everyone involved can already speak the same language), as well as observing both spectacular events (if the ethnographer is so fortunate as to be a witness to history) and the recurring festivals and rituals, which provide a rhythm for social life. Food is central to most occasions for learning and making social relationships, while

it takes careful attention at first to master the particular ingredients, flavors, or patterning of meals.

Anthropologists seek out encounters with other people in order to learn something about them and about human social institutions, habits, and shared meanings, and are from the very first involved in feeding themselves and negotiating the food and the foodways—the complex of mechanisms for producing, procuring, cooking, and sharing food—of the place where they are doing research. This is equally true when the ethnographer is working in an office in a big city and has to finagle invitations to lunches and after-work occasions where people socialize, eat, and drink. It is also true when she is trying simply to get enough food to eat in a town or a village with unfamiliar foods, shops, and markets, and which demands a different set of “foraging” skills than she is initially equipped with. The work of getting food, the occasions at which it is shared, and the meanings it conveys both abstractly and in the course of strategic negotiations, are thus some of the aspects of food itself—as a complex object embedded in networks of exchange and interdependence—that these essays explore, in an array of locations both cultural and geographical, ranging from a family home in Kenya, to a vegetable market in Paris, to a settlement hastily constructed for displaced persons in the Republic of Georgia, the residents of which are provisioned by humanitarian food aid.

Encounters

At the outset of this project, the contributors were asked to write about encounters with food and eating, about episodes and incidents in their own experience of ethnographic fieldwork that revealed something to them—whether about the procedures and conditions of fieldwork itself, or about the people, place, or time of their encounter. Many of the contributors write about or research topics other than food and eating in their main professional work as anthropologists, sociologists, or literary scholars. They were asked to reflect, however, on how an encounter or set of encounters in which food figured prominently helped them develop insights into some more prominent research question they were seeking to answer, or forced them to grapple with some element of the local world that they had previously ignored in their research. This book was thus initially conceived as, and remains, primarily a forum for writing that emphasizes the experiential aspects of ethnography, and the often neglected or marginalized role of disgust, pleasure, and hunger, in the ethnographic task.

The authors were asked to focus on the encounters they had in the field and the way they related to other people and were related to in turn, which are conventionally treated as the “raw” data of fieldwork rather than the “cooked” product of reflection and writing. The relation between ethnography

as experience, as writing, and as research process has been much debated by cultural anthropologists for over a generation. This is not the place to rehash those debates, but the essays collected here do speak to such debates—each is, obviously, “written,” but written with an eye to interpersonal experience and the rich, personal content of social relations. The contributors have left intact the rough edges usually smoothed out by formal analysis: the interpersonal conflicts, thwarted desires, uncomfortable conversations, and often difficult instances of constraint—to eat, to receive gifts, to share potentially dangerous substances—as well as the affection, love, and labor of eating together with others.

In themselves, such experiences are of little intrinsic interest. The celebrated anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss famously warned anthropologists to steer clear of adventure for its own sake. In fieldwork, he wrote, “There are . . . periods of hunger, exhaustion, sickness perhaps. . . . [But] the fact that so much effort and expenditure has to be wasted on reaching the object of our studies bestows no value on that aspect of our profession, and should be seen rather as its negative side” (1973: 17). The authors demonstrate here, to the contrary, that the effort they expended to reach and communicate with others was much appreciated by their interlocutors, and the accidents and incidents of voyaging offered ways of understanding the kinds of effort their interlocutors already engaged in before the ethnographer’s arrival, and the kinds of pleasures and dangers they, too, experience. It is not sheer exoticism that licenses the focus on encounters. Focusing on food as a material object, and on eating as a tangible, sensory, daily experience in fieldwork, highlights the embodied aspect of ethnography, with its incumbent pleasures and perils. More importantly, however, the travails and travels that ethnographers engage in produce a kind of knowledge that exceeds whatever one set out to learn and capture in the ethnography.

As Abdellah Hammoudi clarifies these concepts in a related context, “By ‘experience’ I mean an ethnographic encounter in which the anthropologist meets people as they engage in their own activities” (2009: 48). This is, thus, not simply a matter of writing down experiences or feelings: These essays all recount acts of engagement, encounter, and comparison, offered in the language of “perspicuous contrast,” which has been identified in a previous volume in this series as a key aspect of ethnographic writing (drawing on the work of the philosopher Charles Taylor). “What is significant about the cultural encounter, as we use the term,” Stephan Senders and Alison Truitt write, “is that it jars the anthropologist’s subjective sense of social relations and social order, and even more specifically it brings the anthropologist and her ‘subject’ into a world of shared risk” (Senders and Truitt 2007: 3).

The essays here exemplify this effect of ethnographic co-presence, in highly material terms through exchanges of food. Such exchanges are not simply nourishing or material, but also always include intangible, even spiritual qualities, and sometimes are the occasion for agonistic battles over rights and statuses. That

is, the experiences here are between subjects, not confined to the anthropologist alone. Not only are they shared encounters between researchers and interlocutors but also once these encounters are set down in essays they are available to be shared by the reader. There is a readerly aspect to the work of ethnography, which is necessary to training the ethnographic imagination and to building up a store of ethnographic accounts that can be used to make comparisons, between and within encounters. As Judith Farquhar says, ethnography “cultivates a reader,” and readers “may compare what they see on the page with all manner of other practicalities and textualities” and with their own familiar settings (Farquhar 2002: 19). Ethnographic research can provide the basis for further imaginative engagements, sometimes from quite a distance, yet still be grounded in the process of encounter and engagement *in situ*. Both aspects of the ethnographic task are equally important—indeed, Mary Douglas once wrote that since anthropologists “have a privileged position for cross-cultural comparison, [we] also have a responsibility to exercise it” (1984: 7).

Exchange of Foods

Each of the essays focuses on a locale or a place, and an encounter between, on the one hand, an ethnographer usually identified (by those he comes to research with) as “foreign,” and on the other hand, a “native.” In that respect, the essays follow long conventions of anthropological representation, which have since been subject to some serious critique. This classical staging of the fieldwork encounter has been criticized for being over-determined by differences in power and location between the ethnographer, “authorized” to produce knowledge, and his or her research “subjects,” who are left passive. Working within this very tradition, these essays often show this criticism to be overstated, and sometimes quite misplaced: Fieldworkers are often very dependent on their hosts both materially and emotionally, and material differences and inequalities of power always affect fieldwork relationships in sometimes surprising ways. On closer inspection, such power differences are among the aspects of the fieldwork encounter recognized by all participants, and can be among the strategic resources employed, by everyone involved, to negotiate new grounds of exchange.

The insights into fieldwork and its power dynamics extending across these essays are partly arrived at precisely through the process of reflecting on food as an object of exchange—how we get it, from whom, and what transformations it undergoes as it is made part of social relations. Exchange, and the comparison among substances that it requires, is central both to anthropological theory and to fieldwork practice, and anthropologists have developed elaborate schemas of knowledge about the various kinds of exchange and reciprocity—generalized,

balanced, hierarchical, and egalitarian, to name a few types—involving various different media, from money to intangibles such as kinship.

Food presents something of a special case. Some forty years ago, Marshall Sahlins reviewed the legacy of economic anthropological studies existing at that time, in order to challenge some of the presumptions of classical economics about how people truck, contract, exchange, and barter and what the social meanings of these practices are. When it came to food he found, like many anthropologists before him, a realm of special need and special danger, in which moral and metaphysical qualities were produced and reproduced in the circulation, preparation, and ingestion of foodstuffs.

As several of the essays here attest, food is the primary object of sociable, hospitable offerings, and accepting and returning food requires a finesse that cannot be eliminated by recourse to cash payments. Indeed, within restricted circles of exchange of the sort that anthropologists are often either adopted into or already members of—families, households, and larger social units such as villages and even towns—there is an implicit taboo on accepting repayment for offerings of food. As Sahlins puts the point in anthropological language, “Food has too much social value—ultimately because it has too much use value—to have exchange value” (Sahlins 1972: 218); at least, that is, within specific social boundaries.

When it comes to such reciprocal, albeit often unequal, relationships, food is always more than food; more exactly, “whatever the utilitarian value” at stake in an exchange of food, “*and there need be none*, there is *always* a ‘moral’ purpose” (Sahlins 1972: 220, emphases added). Food is a “concrete,” sensory vehicle of social relations, and by sharing and eating it, personal and collective ties are made and remade. Studying what people do with food as they exchange it with others and eat it together helps us understand local complexities and illuminates otherwise often mystifying cultural practices. For instance, food is used in many ritual contexts in order to make material connections with absent or divine persons; as Robert explores in his essay, in the context of a Vietnamese mourning ritual that involve “feeding” the lost family member. Such material extension of abstract or otherwise invisible social relations, captured by describing the specific ways in which food is tasted, ingested, and exchanged, also provides an avenue to understanding the complexities of national and personal identities, and of large-scale political and economic relations.

Locales and Processes

Each of the essays is located in a particular town or city or village, and is based on time- and place-bound encounters—though some of these encounters extend

across decades. The one possible exception is Jennifer A. Jordan's peripatetic hunt for organic foods and heirloom tomatoes in the markets of Vienna and Paris. However, here too Jordan insists on the difference between her daily shopping routine in Vienna's markets, where she lived for several years, and her focused fieldwork in Paris, where she searched for what she had, by then, realized was the *elusive* heirloom tomato. She seeks local, stable food cultures, inspired by the recent efflorescence of popular books on the contrast such local and "slow" systems of production offer to industrialized and corporatized food production, and she fails to find them. Instead, she discovers how each of the neighborhood markets she visits is differently situated in more- or less-extensive systems of production, transportation, and preservation, and, equally, systems of symbolic value-production—which together give "old" varieties much of their marketability. Jordan's research is exemplary of a certain way of examining large-scale systems that otherwise would escape the grasp of encounter-based research. Indeed, all of the contributors to this volume document ongoing historical and cultural changes in their field sites, and each addresses how processes of change are experienced in specific locales. Jordan's methodological question of how and when ethnography can illuminate large-scale patterns of consumption and change is to some degree shared by all these essays. Each author makes a particular contribution, for instance emphasizing conversations she has had in the field about global political economic inequalities (Meneley), or exploring the visible and edible traces of colonial histories (Harris, Riley).

Indeed, industrialized food systems and processes such as globalization are only addressed in the following essays as they are experienced and encountered in particular places: Several essays document changing food systems through the lens of markets now full of new and exotic foodstuffs, as places such as Kenya and Vietnam become ever-more integrated into the global economy (Berman, Hien). Frédéric Keck explores sites of production and sale of live poultry in Hong Kong, as they are changing to meet the threat of epidemic contagion with avian influenza. This threat demands ever-greater surveillance of the (cultural) systems in which this living being is produced and novel negotiations of the boundary between animal and food (as well as of the boundary between mainland China and Hong Kong). If none of the essays here records multi-sited fieldwork to track the "flows" of food commodities in global networks, all record the comings and goings of their research interlocutors, the movement of others' desire for foods from elsewhere, and the borrowings and adaptations through which cuisines are made: We have here an Indian community in Africa whose foodways reflect centuries-old patterns of Indian Ocean commerce and exchange (Berman); an ethnic Chinese cook in Vietnam experimenting with cosmopolitan tastes and flavors from elsewhere (Hien); and even baguettes in the Marquesas substituting for the traditional breadfruit (Riley). The anthropologist may not move much once she arrives in her field site, but the "culture" and cuisine

written about travel widely, are adapted and transformed, and there are no clear boundaries or static conventions.

On a related point, most of the contributors write about the “non-West,” or about places in “the global South,” but even within that global rubric, they take relatively marginal positions. Even in “major” regions discussed here (East Asia, North Africa, Latin America), encounters with “minor” people in provincial towns or agricultural backwaters become the vehicle for thinking about national histories and even imperial networks. The apparent omission of data from more central or prominent sites of global cultural production provides the basis for illuminating recastings of over-familiar stories. Thus, Mark Harris’s contribution from South America is about riverine peasants in the Brazilian Amazon, people who are seldom included in official histories and “regionalist” narratives, but whose cuisine, routines of hospitality, and elaborate theories of food-borne pollutions can be analyzed for their traces of both Portuguese imperial economies and indigenous cosmologies (or rather, and more meaningfully, imperialist cosmologies and indigenous economies).

North America is largely untouched as an ethnographic field here, except in Anne Meneley’s article, where her Yemeni hosts constantly attribute her maladroitness to the fact that she is Canadian, producing their own ethnography of North America based on their encounter with her. Yet the crucial contemporary concerns that dominate North American conversations, including nutritional poverty amidst caloric affluence, genomic modifications, and food safety in industrialized food production, are by no means neglected in the essays that follow. However, whether it is Keck’s concern with how biosecurity regulations intersect with cultural understandings of the act of eating animals, Penny Van Esterik’s report from a deeply food-insecure country, or Elizabeth Cullen Dunn’s account of how displaced people in Georgia dealt with the glut of boring, empty calories delivered to them in the form of humanitarian food aid, the analytic issues of food policy take on a distinctive, local valence.

Ethnography as it is practiced here seldom produces clear recommendations for change, or advocates one alternative over another. The ethnographers are all astride large and long-term processes, but their primary effort is to register the conditions and impacts in which people seize these processes and make them their own, for better or for worse—not to critique the processes themselves but to better understand how they are lived. Clearly iniquitous and humanly damaging conditions are described here—most intensely by Van Esterik and Dunn. The local impacts of food insecurity, of displacement and violence, and of industrialized and commodified production are registered (the latter, most often, striking the note of sorrow for something lost, the elegiac mode in anthropology). But equally, the pleasure of night fishing (Riley), delectation of carefully saved honey or jam (Dunn), and cycles of work and leisure associated with places we might otherwise describe as deficient in nutrients, money, and global connection

must be registered. Ethnographic encounters always happen between whole persons, who aim to know and relate to each other in the round. This aspect of ethnography is the basis for a gain in knowledge which might empower critique, but it is not itself that critique. That said, one important contribution that such ethnography can provide is to underwrite what has been called the “anthropological veto”: the challenge to abstractions which says, “No, not here [or there]; it is not like that where I work.” Or, as Sahlins insisted in the passages quoted above, food is not just about nutrition, for distinctive moral meaning and community are made in each exchange of food, too.

Small Morals

Meneley’s essay on learning to comport herself in appropriate ways, in the face of the almost over-generous hospitality of her Yemeni hosts, introduces many themes that resonate throughout this volume. Adapting to local food customs is revealed as a key aspect of learning what those customs in fact are, not as an abstract table of “dos and don’ts,” but as a way of expressing ongoing, changing, mutable relationships. Meneley takes us through a fieldwork experience which is shared, with differences, in many of the essays here: fieldwork as a constructive, pedagogical process which starts with one’s own body, where learning occurs in the constant, everyday practice of elaborate and yet flexible systems of etiquette and expectation. Moreover, this is a mutual practice—her Yemeni interlocutors commented on what they took to be Canadian norms, and on the difference from their own ways of eating, sharing, hosting, and indeed being. At its best, this mutual exchange reveals the flexibility and communicative breadth of both cultural systems. Moreover, as Meneley is at pains to point out, and as Nina Hien explores in more detail in her essay here, people everywhere navigate within their own food systems, and have their own personal preferences and dislikes. Often, the first thing a fieldworker has to learn is how to say “enough,” to end a meal without losing face or shaming her hosts. Meneley does arrive at that point, learning that “as long as you [had] established that you did not disdain all Yemeni food, saying that you did not like a particular dish was fine.”

Much of what Meneley writes about is specific to Yemen, even to the milieu of a particular town, and that is what gives her ethnographic writing its texture and motivates her, and her hosts’, comparisons. Specific dishes, particular ways of preparing and taking *qat*—a chewable leaf with stimulant properties—and the conversations and encounters that occur during and over these meals all are recounted with zest and flavor intact. We encounter many of the same habits and even ingredients in the next essay, Berman’s account of cooking and eating, over thirty years of visits she has made to Kenya, with a Muslim Gujarati family in Mombasa. This cultural similarity, with important differences, between

provincial Yemen and cosmopolitan Mombasa reflects Indian Ocean cultures and how they have been shaped by generations of travel and exchange between East Africa, the Middle East, and India. These travels maintain continuities, too: The family and community Berman lives with in Kenya cook and eat a distinctive cuisine, and an identifiably Indian one, characterized by fried flatbreads and coconut rice served with aromatic curries.

Yet, the context Berman describes is fast changing. She conveys much of the specificity of the food through careful accounts of the actual cooking, with attention paid to the work of the household and the techniques with which the food is prepared, and then recounts the ways in which the changing socioeconomic circumstances of this family, and for Mombasa at large, have introduced new habits, tastes, and desires—as well as allowing some of the women of the family to direct their work of cooking toward the marketplace, and earn income. All of this change and flux is understood within the framework of care, affection, and mutual curiosity constituted over a long friendship, and even as food habits change (and as each individual's dietary needs also change) cooking and eating for and with each other remains a site of intercultural exchange and understanding. Here, as for Meneley, Harris, and other contributors, food is the vehicle and the substance for forging connections, and Berman's essay folds out from the compact descriptions of techniques and routines of food preparation to indicate some of the contemporary urban changes her friends are living through.

That is to say, food habits, or simply table manners, are indeed “small morals” (a phrase, and a comparison, coined by the seventeenth-century English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*). Meneley recounts an exacting training in another morality and set of moral and social relations through the constant talk about, monitoring of, and generosity with food and cooking. Likewise, Harris's essay about *panema*, or contagious threats to masculine skills of hunting and fishing among Amazon-basin riverine peasants, demonstrates how the social world that links humans to their natural environment (through “edible” relations with, and ideas about, animals, spirits, and the like) is managed through prohibitions and taboos both minor and great. Harris's focus on the historical production of the norms and habits now embedded in ideas like *panema* presents some very interesting comparisons with Keck's very different topic of biosecurity measures and the control of trans-species contagion in Hong Kong. Both authors are drawing, critically, from the tradition of structuralist studies that mapped conceptual schemas and symbolic interrelations hidden in meaningful uses of foods. Harris and Keck produce novel insights into how such schemas are not only expressions of logical or conceptual problems, but are actively drawn upon and reshaped to meet challenges and threats in the widest social environment, including dangers presented by the proximity of animals and humans, when both are equally seen as living beings and moral subjects in a world of interdependence.

One theme that reoccurs across all of these essays, mostly in illuminating asides that emerge from the conscious focus on various fieldwork experiences, is the negotiation and navigation of fieldwork ethics. This emerges here as a matter of subtle negotiations of hospitality, reciprocity, and both social and biological boundaries, rather than as a question of adherence to bureaucratically defined human subjects' protections. The co-presence and co-residence entailed by ethnographic fieldwork of this kind brings both ethical and biological burdens, and moreover often exposes the fieldworker to disease and infection, or at least the threat thereof. For Harris, it is a *cafezinho* made with suspect river water; for Meneley and, likewise, for Claire Nicholas and Van Esterik, the water presents quotidian dangers, the results of which are both unpleasant and ultimately, for Van Esterik, very serious. For Hien, it is a matter rather of pungent, and to some people repellent, ingredients such as fish sauce and durian, which pose no danger other than to the taste buds of the ethnographer. It is the standard advice, only half-jokingly offered, to fieldworkers: Make sure your water is boiled. The essays here openly discuss how these hygienic requirements, imposed by the unskilled body of the Western ethnographer who is "not used to the food," lead to the negotiation of different demands, the distant one of medical advice, the proximate one of reciprocal engagement. In all these cases, one's fear of disease, one's disgust, is no match for the obligation to accept gifts when they are offered.

Safety and Security

The conventional narrative in food-related social science has it that countries on the up-swing of development will move from concerns with food security—adequate nutrition for the whole population—to new concerns with food safety that are particularly associated with large-scale industrial processing and anonymous chains of food production and packaging. Ethnographic research puts these assumptions in a new perspective, highlighting the interdependence of food safety and food security, and further drawing attention to broader moral and political concerns that are also involved in seemingly technical questions of nutrition and safety.

In his account of biosecurity measures implemented to control the spread of avian influenza, Keck works with chicken farmers, hangs out in the part of a marketplace reserved for selling live chickens—and now for killing them as well, so that chickens will not be slaughtered in home kitchens, which risks wider contamination and spread of the disease—and follows the practice of Buddhist groups that buy live animals at the markets and release them back into the "wild" (though, as he discovers, this could be seen as another form of consumption, especially since the wild into which the animals are released is a densely urbanized area and not all that hospitable). The biosecurity and food