

The Editors' Note
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Vogues in social science are sometimes difficult to explain. So what is it about food? To the staggering overflow of cookbooks and of television food shows can now be added books—anthropological, poetic, historical, sociological—about food. . . . Never before have there been so many books about food itself, the experience of eating, the relation between taste and smell, the sensual and sensory of food—food and sex, food and gender, food and obesity, food and ethnicity. This onrush of tracts dealing with the subject shows no signs of slackening, yet no one (least of all this reviewer) seems able to explain it. Social scientists figure among the writers. Novelists and autobiographers are not far behind. Unlike Proust, most of them are writing about food, not about food's relevance to life's experience; life turns out to be a background for food, as it has become background for every other burning subject of the moment.

--Sidney W. Mintz, [L'Appetit Vient en Mangeant](#), 1998

As the late Sidney W. Mintz—widely regarded as the father of “Food Anthropology” and to whom this selection of articles appears in tribute—noted in 1998, food has come into serious vogue in anthropology, the social sciences, and throughout the world. Although food has long been a topic of anthropological research, interest in food exploded in the 1990s and has been growing ever since. In a curious reversal, just when the celebrants of Western modernization were ready to pronounce humanity's liberation from its constant food quest, the quest for food reappears to define our times. Whether the food quest is a constant search for the aesthetic or the authentic, for contemplation or entertainment, for study, or for staking moral and political positions, food continues to consume us.

We are still in the midst of a food studies surfeit: a 2016 indexed list counted over [30 current food studies journals](#). Whither then the anthropology of food? What might a food anthropology offer to a subject in vogue and yet perhaps insufficiently defined? One telling example is a recent exchange in *Cultural Anthropology* around the basic provocative question—[What is Food?](#)

The articles highlighted in this issue of *Open Anthropology* demonstrate the distinctive contribution of food anthropology to the subject of food. First, anthropology's multi-dimensional approach tackles the subject of food from archaeological, biological, cultural, and linguistic perspectives. Second, anthropology's traditional disciplinary commitment is to include the whole of humanity, learning with people who have often been excluded from food studies

privileging elite gastronomy. Finally, anthropology's ethnographic documentation aims to contribute to change and unrealized possibilities.

Our first selection, "Heroes Sung and Unsung" by [Sidney W. Mintz](#) lays the groundwork for this approach. Mintz's talk, published in *Nutritional Anthropology* in 2002, highlights three predecessors to the rapidly growing field of food studies. In his hallmark fashion, Mintz draws from both those who would be considered anthropologists and from those outside the discipline, and he elucidates "personal as well as professional histories" (3). As ever, Mintz is concerned with teaching, preparing a syllabus for a food course, and broadening perspectives. With an eye for the particular and ethnographic detail, Mintz argues for the importance of three predecessors in food studies—William Robertson Smith, Redcliffe Salaman, Adam Maurizio—who should be foundational to an interdisciplinary approach: "My aim here was simple: to bring into view three food scholars, among many others, whom I think we should keep in mind, if we concern ourselves with building an interdisciplinary field of food studies" (8).

[Amanda L. Logan's](#) "Archaeology of Food Security in Banda, Ghana" is similarly concerned with a long-term, comparative perspective. Published in the 2016 *Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association*, Logan explains how archaeology can be useful to explain a fundamental paradox of our times: "The paradox is that the world produces ample foodstuffs to feed the globe's entire population, yet the unequal distribution of these food supplies still results in widespread food insecurity—even in countries like the United States, which produce a massive surfeit of foodstuffs" (106). Logan uses a dataset from Banda, Ghana to marshal a comparative approach over a one thousand year period, connecting "ethnoarchaeological observations of the present directly with the past to build a baseline, so that we may better determine the relative impacts of different environmental and economic shifts today and in the past" (110). While archaeology has long discussed the emergence of agriculture, the intensification of food production, and contributed to research on foodways, Logan wishes "to push archaeologists to also consider the less tasteful end of the spectrum, by documenting how and when people in the past experienced food insecurity" (116). This push allows Logan to recognize the political and economic dimensions of food insecurity: "The Banda case study, for example, counters the misconception that Africa has always suffered from food insecurity. Archaeobotanical, environmental, and craft production data instead suggest that food and economic security declined in the last 150 years, coincident with the Atlantic slave trade and colonial rule" (116).

Also concerned with the political and economic conditions of food insecurity is [John Mazzeo](#) who contributes "Laviché: Haiti's Vulnerability to the Global Food Crisis." Published in the *NAPA Bulletin* in 2009, Mazzeo examines how "the rise in food prices reached a breaking point in Haiti leading to a series of food riots in several cities" (115). Like the paradox examined in Logan's "Archaeology of Food Security," Mazzeo is examining how rural peasant households—commonly understood as

subsistence food producers—were in fact the most vulnerable to the food price shock:

The value of agricultural commodities at the marketplace and the need for cash give agriculture both subsistence and an exchange function. As a result, Haitian households neither produce everything they consume, nor consume all that they produce. Rural Haitian households must perform a precarious balancing act to match sporadic income against steady expenditures for food, education, health care, and what they take to be other necessities. (121)

Mazzeo's work affirms what Mintz said in the 1960s about the importance of peasant production but within a system of local agricultural markets. Mazzeo also affirms [Drexel Woodson's](#) call in *Lamanjay, Food Security, Sécurité Alimentaire* for a full accounting of the potential for peasant food production. And so when Mazzeo notes that "the best cases of success can be found in the work of small NGOs that work closely with existing social organizations" (128), this is yet another call for long-term funding of research that could truly inform food aid and food security policies.

The next two selections shift attention to biological and biocultural perspectives. They also prompt an examination of a twinned dimension of ongoing food insecurity: obesity, fat stigma, and the global obesity epidemic. In the 2013 *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, [Amy McLennan](#) reviews the edited volume *Human Diet and Nutrition in Biocultural Perspective. Past Meets Present* (Tina Moffat and Tracy Prowse, eds.) and *Obesity. Cultural and Biocultural Perspectives* by Alexandra A. Brewis. McLennan sees these books illustrating how human diet is "an interesting subject through which to think about biocultural approaches and their use in medical anthropology" (b15). However, as in the case studies regarding repeated calls for research in Haiti, McLennan laments that the interdisciplinary promise of bioculturalism proffered over twenty years ago has yet to be realized (b17-b18). McLennan does find Brewis's book to be more integrative, and that whereas "Moffat and Prowse's volume hints at the still-unrealized potential of truly integrative biocultural research, Brewis's illustrates how it might be done" (b18).

[Alexandra Brewis](#) is co-author with [Amber Wutich](#) on "A World of Suffering? Biocultural Approaches to Fat Stigma in the Global Contexts of the Obesity Epidemic." Published in the 2015 *Annals of Anthropological Practice* (formerly *NAPA Bulletin*), Brewis and Wutich begin by observing that "one of the most striking human biological trends of recent decades has been massive globalization of overweight and obesity" (269). Although social science has emphasized social factors in this trend, "the dominant cultural model in both clinical treatment and public health discourse around obesity remains one focused on the role of individual responsibility and failure" (269). This mismatch of social science explanation and cultural model has serious repercussions for attempted interventions. Brewis and Wutich use a diverse sample from Bolivia, India, Paraguay, and students and Muslim women in the United States, focusing on possible differences between explicitly

stated fat stigma and their implicit ideas. Interestingly, “high anti-fat norms as expressed by items on standard scales . . . do not necessarily reflect underlying internalization of those norms as personally salient beliefs” (279). Providing quantitative evidence for a much more locally diverse array of beliefs than might be indicated by a globalized fat stigma discourse, Brewis and Wutich conclude:

These findings suggest the means to use empirical analysis of human cultural and biological variation to flip that perspective, allowing the possibility to “look upward” to consider how differences in people’s vulnerabilities might be leveraged to find the best localized strategies to tackle structural factors with the goal to create better health. (281)

Appearing in *Ethos*, the Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology, [Sandra Soo-Jin Lee’s](#) “Dys-appearing Tongues and Bodily Memories: The Aging of First-Generation Resident Koreans in Japan,” similarly brings together psychological and linguistic analysis with ideas of embodiment and bodily memory. Published in 2000, Lee’s attention to issues of diasporic identity, immigration, and the sensory aspects of food is in some ways ahead of its time. Concerned with bodily memory and Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* or how “codes of behavior are ‘memorized’ and incorporated by the body” (198), Lee discovers the power of *kimchee*:

While working with the resident Korean community, I observed the close association between Korean identity and the ability to eat *kimchee*, an ever-present side dish of fermented cabbage stuffed with red pepper and garlic. In ways I had not anticipated, the partaking of Korean food was an important testament to my credibility when meeting resident Koreans for the first time. (200)

Interestingly, however, the elderly resident Koreans faced “increasing difficulty in digesting many staple Korean dishes” (201), which some interpreted as identity loss due to their extended time in Japan. Despite pain and health effects, “elderly, first-generation resident Koreans attempt to rectify [perceived] bodily insufficiency by rejecting the transformed body and reinscribing it with their ‘native tastes’ and by using a rhetoric of moral failure and cultural inauthenticity, rather than recognizing the change as an inevitable result of aging” (217). Lee sees this research on bodily memory as going beyond Bourdieu’s *habitus* which “often suffers from the same totalizing effects of assumptions of bounded communities in which behavioral codes are treated as uniform and unproblematic” (217). While emerging from the humanistic and ethnographic, Lee’s account therefore nicely complements the quantitative analysis of Brewis and Wutich, as both argue for closer attention to the local and personal variabilities that can be missed when media images—or indeed ideas about *culture*—can too easily stand in for close attention to what people believe, do, and say.

An impressive array of participants—[Jillian R. Cavanaugh](#), [Kathleen C. Riley](#), [Alexandra Jaffe](#), [Christine Jourdan](#), [Martha Karrebaek](#), and [Amy Paugh](#)—

highlight the role of linguistic anthropology. Published in the 2014 *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, “What Words Bring to the Table: The Linguistic Anthropological Toolkit as Applied to the Study of Food” introduces methods used to study food and language simultaneously and in interrelation. Arguing for the joint study of food and language, the authors see “a range of fundamental alignments between these two forms of social practice” (85). The authors proceed to discuss “(E)merging Food-and-Language Methodologies,” stating that “newly food-focused methods have emerged for all of us out of the specific methods we were trained to use for the study of language in use” (88). Reminiscent of Lee’s approach to bodily memory and the “dys-appearing tongues” for Korean residents in Japan “subjects broached by the researchers . . . include the ideological (re)evaluation of food(s) and language(s) as ‘good’ or ‘authentic,’ the production and reproduction of moral order via food-and-language socialization, and the loss or transformation of food-and-language regimes over time” (95). The authors hope the article “will spur researchers to locate new and interesting field sites while also taking steps toward conceptualizing how local everyday forms of semiosis and large-scale, long-term forces of change involving food and language intersect” (95).

While many have celebrated what the linguistic anthropologists refer to as contemporary re-evaluations of foods and languages as good or authentic, anthropologists often explore the underside of such purported re-evaluations. This is a point powerfully made by [María Elena García](#) in “The Taste of Conquest: Colonialism, Cosmopolitics, and the Dark Side of Peru's Gastronomic Boom” appearing in the 2013 *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*. Peruvian cuisine is experiencing a gastronomic boom, both at home and abroad, winning featured reviews in *Gourmet*, *Food & Wine*, and spawning “culinary adventures” (511). There is much at stake in this debate for anthropologists like García:

As a Peruvian anthropologist based in the United States, I enter these debates with trepidation, but I do so because the stakes are not simply about national pride or culinary tastes. The new gastronomic boom requires critical attention because its celebratory glow obscures a dark side of continuing marginalization and violence against indigenous and nonhuman bodies in Peru. (507)

Indeed, for those organizing for indigenous rights in Peru, the gastronomic boom does not help the cause. “Good intentions notwithstanding, this social alliance anchors indigenous peoples in certain places: they are producers, not chefs, or street vendors, but never celebrities. Social hierarchies remain remarkably unaltered” (515). The implications are more than symbolic, as an increasing demand for “iconic Andean animals has led to a move away from artisanal breeding and slaughter toward more intensive (even industrial) agricultural models” (519). In the end, while García hesitates about casting doubt on “a moment of Peruvian triumph,” she writes that “if we can ‘slow down’ the celebratory cosmopolitanism . . . we may be able to see the dark side of the ‘boom’ and the worlds it obscures” (521).

Also exploring issues of re-evaluation and revitalization is [David Sutton's](#) "Whole Foods: Revitalization through Everyday Synesthetic Experience. Appearing in *Anthropology and Humanism* in 2000—the same year as Lee's "Dys-appearing Tongues" article and with interconnected themes—Sutton suggests food might be analyzed as a "cultural site and is especially useful in understanding Greek experiences of displacement, fragmentation, and the reconstruction of wholeness" (121). Interestingly, although many anthropologists have written against an imagination of cultural wholeness, this seems to be precisely what these food experiences most intend to evoke. "They are often experienced in terms of a 'burning desire' that is satiated through a sensory experience evoking local knowledge, at the same time that a domain of experience that has fallen into disuse . . . is revalued. They often explicitly evoke wholeness, or fullness in experience" (125). Although Sutton does mention some of the contradictory aspects, and that this evocation may be of an imagined national past, he ends with a nod to the essence of revitalization:

Anyone who has had the good fortune to have enjoyed at the Fernandez table a bowl of garlic soup—either hot garlic soup with egg prepared by Jim, or cold garlic soup with almonds prepared by Renate Fernandez—can attest to the revitalizing power of food as one of many community-building measures undertaken by Jim and Renate to counter the powerful forces of fragmentation in our academic lives. (127)

In comparison, [Brad Weiss's](#) "Making Pigs Local: Discerning the Sensory Character of Place," in the 2011 volume of *Cultural Anthropology* explores the contradictions of projects intent on local revitalization and recovery. The place is North Carolina, where industrial pig production has exploded in the past thirty years. "This radical transformation has generated a landscape of displacement, as small farms are increasingly consolidated under the contractual obligations of vertical integration, and long-standing methods of raising livestock give way to confined animal feeding operations" (438). But at the same time there is a burgeoning alternative scene: "And so, in the heart of a state thoroughly transformed by the dislocations wrought by industrial pork production, pasture-raised pork has become a central feature of the 'local food' scene" (439). Weiss explores these complexities in part by calling into question the assumed linkages between place and taste, and showing how these links are often contingent and shifting performances (444-45). In this movement toward "local food," Weiss discovers "the role of discernment and the integration of sensory fields" (456). However, this role for discernment also means attempting to understand "what, and more importantly, who, is not recognized in such place making" (456). Like García notes about indigenous producers in Peru's gastroeconomic boom, Weiss suggests that "issues of race and class are uneasily incorporated into the politics of 'local food'" and that the role of black farmers in the production of the local remains unclear (456).

Similar questions engage [Katherine Lambert-Pennington](#) and

[Kathryn Hicks](#), authors of “Class Conscious, Color-Blind: Examining the Dynamics of Food Access and the Justice Potential of Farmers Markets.” Lambert-Pennington and Hicks put the issue bluntly: “Although often intended to address injustices in food access, farmers markets tend to cater to affluent communities, and to exclude on the basis of race and class” (57). This article, published in the 2016 volume of *Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment*, specifically discusses efforts made to increase access to farmers markets. Lambert-Pennington and Hicks document these efforts in Memphis-area markets with regard to accepting and integrating Senior Farmers Market Nutritional Program (SFMNP) vouchers. The specific mechanisms around SFMNP sparked conversations about race and class. The conclusions are well worth attending to for those interested in alternative food networks:

While these concrete programmatic changes provided more places for seniors to use their SFMNP vouchers and offered an avenue for farmers markets to meet their social justice aims, they can only go so far in challenging the association between whiteness and alternative food institutions. Despite the best intentions of a number of people to address issues of equity and access through SFMNP, many African-American seniors experienced exclusion, whether in the form of not being able to use vouchers at their local market or at road side stands, or in the form of feeling marked by the spatial arrangement and long lines . . . While these problems were ultimately addressed, the resistance of many Memphians in public conversations to understand these dynamics in terms of race and not just income level and class served as another form of minimizing the experiences of people of color, itself a form of exclusion. Importantly, this example highlights the need for conversations about who has access to these spaces, both on the part of those who experience exclusion as well as those who experience racial and class privilege. (65)

Reminiscent of the tensions in North Carolina between producing pigs for industrial quantity and place-based quality concerns, [Yuson Jung's](#) 2016 article in *Economic Anthropology* examines post-socialist economic transitions. Jung's title, “Re-creating economic and cultural values in Bulgaria's wine industry: From an economy of quantity to an economy of quality?” nicely encapsulates the research. Bulgaria was of course part of the Soviet empire and was designated as the major wine supplier, developing large-scale industry for the purpose. In the post-socialist years there is no longer a guaranteed Soviet market, and attention has turned to quality, locality, and the values of artisanal production. Jung does ethnographic research

to show how different attitudes and understandings of technologies in the wine industry relate to the social construction of “quality.” As a marginal wine-producing country with a compelling history of winemaking, the Bulgarian case offers an interesting vantage point from which to think about the cultural economy of the globalized food system. (281)

In this setting, Jung finds that “many of the Bulgarian wineries seemed to be wrestling with multiple values that were competing against each other” (290). As a lesser-known wine-producing region, Bulgarian producers must navigate global values and discourses, as well as a number of competing local notions of tradition and production.

The 2010 *Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Europe* contains [Thomas M. Wilson's](#) review of [Around the Tuscan Table: Food, Family, and Gender in Twentieth-Century Florence](#) by Carole Counihan. Counihan's book takes us into what might be considered the heartland of many food studies, and Wilson has high praise: “Perhaps my praise will not be surprising when one realizes that the author of this book is a pioneer and continuing leader in the anthropology of food, but the majesty of this work derives principally from its fine balance of ethnographic detail, research reflexivity, theoretical provocations, and author empathy and engagement” (45). Counihan examines historical forces, life histories, and contemporary transformations. “Counihan shows us how these Florentines lived the transformations from poverty to well-being . . . and she also shows us how the material well-being of today has not been accepted uncritically by Florentines who remember and to some degree long for, the food of the past, and what society was like, in years gone by” (46).

The final two articles in this compilation return to the issues of hunger and implications of food insecurity. “Teachers’ Work, Food Policies, and Gender in Argentina” by [Sarah A. Robert](#) and [Heather Killelea McEntarfer](#) begins with understudied questions:

Curiously few studies question the implications of school feeding for the teaching profession, let alone question the gendered implications of food work on a feminine and feminized profession. How are teachers involved in school feeding programs, which provide such vital support for students’ education? How does that involvement affect teachers’ work in a moment characterized by cuts in social services and economic crises? (260)

Published in the 2014 *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Robert and McEntarfer tackle these questions through ethnographic data in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Their research combines literature on teaching as a gendered profession, and feeding as a gendered activity, both involving “discourses of caring, self-sacrifice, and nurturing” (260). Robert and McEntarfer find that the effects were complex. “For individual teachers, efforts to prevent student hunger added to the work that they needed to complete. Yet those efforts made possible the work of teaching subject matter to students” (271). They conclude that within a global context of cuts to state education budgets, “school communities will need to mobilize and struggle for the needs of their students at all levels of education around the globe. Demanding policies and the historical nature of teachers’ work means there is no escaping this extra work” (271).

In the 2008 *Anthropology News* on “Unwrapping Hunger in the Classroom: Teaching the Anthropology of Food and Food Policy,” **Ellen Messer** provides a summary of teaching goals and strategies. Messer is a biocultural anthropologist who has been teaching about world hunger for over thirty years. Taking us back to issues raised by Sidney Mintz regarding the need for interdisciplinary collaboration, Messer shows us that “thematic interdisciplinary courses integrate concepts and case study materials from international relations, economics, the life sciences and policy studies” (25). Messer also turns anthropological attention to community, culture, and local agriculture: “Detailed investigations of local agriculture can provide evidence demonstrating the impacts of globalization on local livelihoods, diets and nutrition, demonstrating rather than asserting the benefits or costs of diverse food policies” (25).

Many of the authors featured in this compilation also appear in two recent edited volumes which may be useful for food studies courses. Candice Lowe Smith and Richard Wilk are editors for [Teaching Food and Culture](#) (published June 2015). Jakob A. Klein and James L. Watson are editing [The Handbook of Food and Anthropology](#) (forthcoming August 2016). Given the enormous literature produced on food anthropology, there are many more resources available in the publications of the American Anthropological Association. For a longer bibliography and additional thoughts, see this 2016 blog-post on [Food Anthropology](#) posted in anticipation of this issue of *Open Anthropology*.

The materials collected here are from outside what are generally considered two flagship journals of the American Anthropological Association, *American Anthropologist* and *American Ethnologist*. There are of course many strong articles available in these flagship publications, but by venturing outside these journals, the selection here hopes to evoke Mintz’s approach to “Heroes Sung and Unsung.” This selection also speaks to the potential of food studies in anthropology. As Mintz and Christine Du Bois put it in their 2002 review on the [Anthropology of Food and Eating](#):

Much remains to be done in exploring foodways in other areas of the world. In this setting, anthropologists are in a good position to make useful contributions to the development of policy in regard to health and nutrition, food inspection, the relation of food to specific cultures, world hunger, and other subjects. By and large, though, they have not taken full advantage of this opportunity. (111)

This collection shows that much that has been done, but there are yet unrealized opportunities for food anthropology.

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