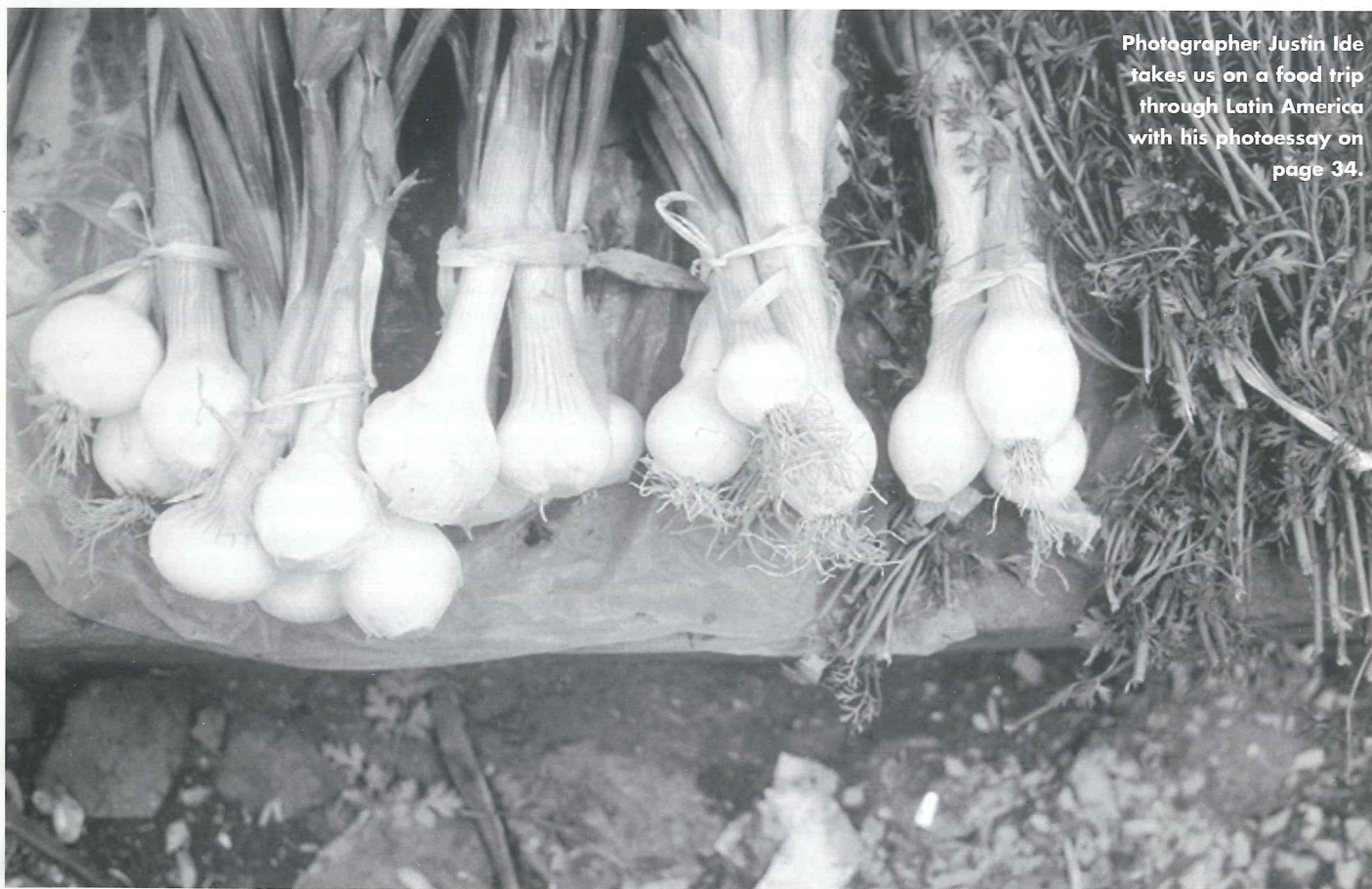


DAVID ROCKEFELLER CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

# DRCLAS NEWS

HARVARD UNIVERSITY • SPRING 2001 NEWSLETTER



Photographer Justin Ide takes us on a food trip through Latin America with his photoessay on page 34.

## Food in the Americas

*Food, Culture, and Nutrition*

BY FRANCES MOORE LAPPÉ

**T**HIRTY YEARS AGO I FOLLOWED MY INTUITION, AND IT LED ME TO FOOD. I FIGURED THAT IF I JUST UNDERSTOOD why hunger in the world I could untangle the complexities of the political and economy order. I would know what to do.

More than that, I sensed that because food is a primal need as well as our most direct, daily link to the earth and to one another it had unequaled power to affect our consciousness. Through food, I believed we might begin to understand the root of our global predicament. Through the eyes of Annapoorna—the Indian goddess of food—I thought we might be able to see the world anew.

From that intuition *Diet for a Small Planet* was born in 1971. Now, 30 years later, I have just completed a sequel—*Hope's Edge: The New Diet for a Small Planet*—written with my daughter Anna, who at 27 is precisely the age I was when I wrote the first book. We set out to see for ourselves what has changed in 30





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years. We became more convinced than ever of the power of food to illuminate the changes we must and can make to heal our relationship with the earth and one another.

This issue "Food, Culture and Nutrition" intrigues me because it touches on so many elements of an intricate reweaving taking place. Throughout most of human evolution, food production and consumption was not a distinct realm but deeply embedded in community, culture and nature. Several authors in this issue—Ester Shapiro and Nina M. Scott among them—examine the grounding role food has always played in culture. They remind us that only in a blink of historical time food has been ripped from community and reduced to a mere commodity. Anna and I traveled to four continents to witness signs of the re-embedding of food within a nexus of values and relationships far beyond the strictly economic. This emergence, we found, is everywhere yet remains largely invisible.

We talked with coffee farmers in Central America who are part of what's called the "fair trade" movement and quickly realized that they see themselves as doing more than simply fighting for better, more stable prices for their product. They spoke of a different kind of business relationship with traders and consumers, one that is open and rooted in mutual respect. They talked of growing coffee organically motivated by multiple levels of awareness—their own health, the health of those who drink their coffee and the health of forests.

In Brazil we sat with Landless Workers Movement (MST) activists in their tiny settlement shacks with nothing but sheets of black plastic to shield them from Paraná's bitter winter wind. We heard the hardships they've endured to further their goal of creating communities in which the end is the individuals' well being, not production itself. How their farming and marketing practices are linked to deeper—what they called non-consumerist—values they are consciously imparting to their children through curriculum based on Paulo's Freire's insights.

In Belo Horizonte, Brazil, we talked with city officials who decided that access to good food for all has nothing to do with charity; and it's not something the market alone can provide. Food, good food, is a right of citizenship, they told us. That one shift in approach, beginning in 1993, has unleashed dozens of innovations throughout the city, making fresh, organic food available even to the poor.

As we traveled, looked and listened, we realized that none of the positive developments emerging could I have realistically predicted thirty years ago. Many, it's true have sprung not from new insight but from sheer desperation. In this issue, for example, you'll read about Cuba's rejection of chemical and fossil-fuel intensive farming, not in response to suddenly acquired ecological consciousness but from necessity. Nevertheless, this and many examples we observed demonstrate the productive potential of learning from and working with nature rather than attempting to override it in a single-minded focus on production.

Thirty years ago few questioned this productivist stance that failed to ask whether hungry people actually had access

to what gets produced—in India, for example, Anna and I saw mountains of rotting grain "surplus" the same day a leading nutritionist there told us half of Indian children are stunted from lack of food—or whether our technologies of production were destroying long-term fertility.

Yes, some still insist—as Professors Paarlberg and Solbrig do in this issue—that we must place maximum output first. But over this period, whether by necessity or new insight—the realization that post-war productivism has destroyed as much as one-third of the earth's arable land—a profound shift of understanding has begun to take hold as well. More and more people now see that productivism has blinded us to ways we human beings actually create the very scarcity we say we fear: most dramatically by allowing the market to shrink our potential food supply as it drives an ever-greater share—now almost half—of the world's grain supply into livestock. In our travels, we met many people, across diverse cultures, climates, classes and cuisines, who now perceive the ecological and health hazards—now painfully evident in fast-spreading animal disease—of highly concentrated factory farming.

Letting go of the reductionist, mechanistic model of farming, they are showing us how we can create abundance by learning from nature's wisdom and rebuild even severely depleted soils. They allow us to see that the biggest obstacle to overcome is not scarcity but our dominant "mental map," one that has driven us to detach food production and consumption from non-economic values and to generate scarcity from plenty.

*Frances Moore Lappé is the author of twelve books and co-founder of the Institute for Food and Development Policy (Food First), now in its 26th year. Presently she is a visiting scholar at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where with her daughter Anna Lappé she completed Hope's Edge: The New Diet for a Small Planet (Tarcher/Putnam 2002).*

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# Diet, Poverty, Lifestyle and Health

*A conundrum for Latin Americans—de la sartén al fuego?*

BY GUILLERMO HERRERA

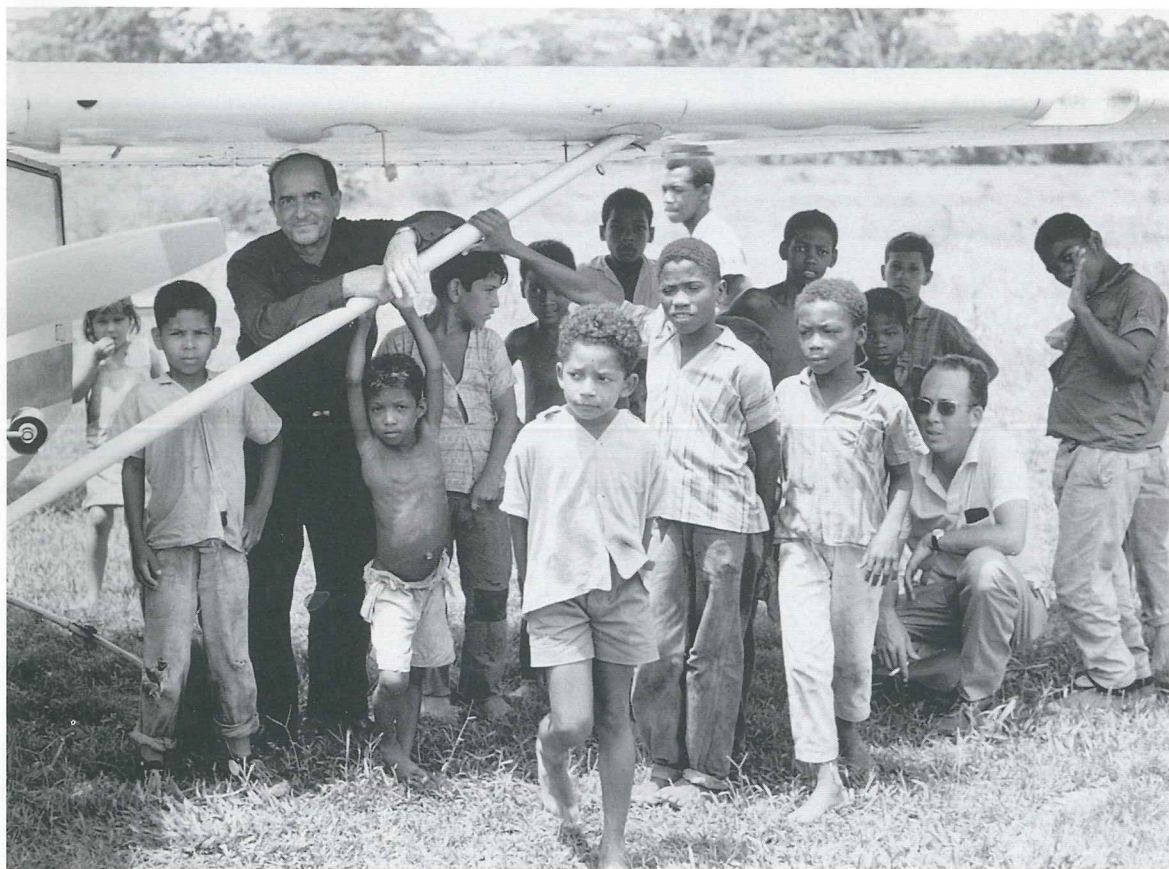
ON A SUMMER DAY IN THE EARLY 1970's two Harvard Medical students boarded a small plane in Turbo, Antioquia, Colombia, and flew to an isolated community in the northeast of the province. They were part of an ad hoc medical mission organized by Father Fernández, a Jesuit priest who indulged both his vocation of ministering to the poor and his love of aviation by flying health teams into isolated communities. The students, based at a small hospital in Apartadó, were serving two-month clerkships as participants in what was then a unique fourth year elective: "Medicine 518: Rural Medicine and Nutrition in Latin America" offered by the Department of Nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health. Both students had

learned medical Spanish in an intensive language program offered as part of the elective.

Although village children were familiar with Father Fernández' plane, they had never seen an automobile since there were no roads into the area. The visitors made their way to the small health post, now closed, but previously staffed by a practical nurse who had left several months earlier and not yet been replaced. As the village priest, the deputy mayor and other community leaders greeted the visitors, a man walked into the center of town with a wooden chair strapped to his back. Pedro Miguel, a sad four-year-old pale little boy with a very swollen face had been sitting on the chair for close to five hours. He had been ill for two weeks with mild diarrhea, weakness,

loss of appetite and progressive swelling of the legs, eyelids and then the whole face.

During the previous week Pedro Miguel had spent most of the time in his cot, refusing food except for small amounts of potato and diluted soup. The swelling progressed, alarming his parents who brought him to Father Fernández because they knew that "swelling came before death." Pedro Miguel had been sick in the past with chicken pox, measles and many colds and episodes of diarrhea "like all children get". He had been immunized once, although not the required three times. According to his father, Pedro Miguel was not a good eater. His diet consisted of corn porridge, arepas (corn bread), small amounts of beans and potato-



Colombian children meet Father Fernández's plane with its flying health team.



based soups and almost no animal protein. Pedro Miguel's parents were in their thirties. They farmed a small plot of land to which they did not have title where they grew corn, potatoes and a few vegetables. They kept two hens but the eggs were usually sold. Neither parent had finished grammar school.

Pedro Miguel's pulse was 100. He was pale and his nail beds were white, a finding that was not given enough importance at the time. His hair was thin and could be easily plucked. The abdomen was soft but somewhat distended and the liver was large. Edema was massive over his face, including lips and eyelids; he could hardly open his eyes. The students were well trained to focus on Pedro Miguel's diagnosis and treatment, but that was the tip of the iceberg. They had much to learn about the submerged portion of the problem, the web of indirect causes of Pedro Miguel's life-threatening plight that would be impossible for them to cure.

The students reasoned that the swelling was due to low concentrations of albumen, a protein produced by the liver that is largely responsible for maintaining the osmotic pres-

sure that reabsorbs fluid from the tissues back into the circulation. The likely diagnosis was kwashiorkor, or severe protein malnutrition which is usually the result of a diet chronical-

**Empowering target populations is an essential step towards reducing extreme poverty, a prerequisite for access to an adequate diet.**

ly deficient in good quality protein accompanied by severe infection. They reasoned that Pedro Miguel was anemic because of his pallor but the severity was underestimated, perhaps because our diagnostic skills were blunted by technology available in Boston. The students knew that children with kwashiorkor have a 50% chance of dying even if admitted to a hospital for treatment.

The nearest health facility was more than one hour away by air and days away on foot. The boy was flown to Medellín, the capital of the province. As the small plane climbed over 15,000 feet to cross the Andes, Pedro Miguel became unconscious and had a seizure. Belatedly, we realized that the pale nail bed had not been taken seriously enough: he was suffering from critical lack of oxygen in the brain, the result of altitude (the cabin was not pressurized) and anemia far more severe than had been assumed. The pilot agreed to fly the canyons at a lower altitude and the boy looked better. When the plane landed in Medellín he was awake. The students drove him to the main public hospital where the resident physician in charge of the Emergency Department turned them away: he had two beds available and two dozen critically ill children in the waiting area. He suggested that they take care of Pedro Miguel at home and bring him back on Monday. Although sympathetic, he saw little sense in flying children with kwashiorkor to the University Hospital: Pedro Miguel should have been taken to a local hospital...what he did not say was that local hospitals were underutilized because people knew that they were understaffed, lacked supplies and were often unable to provide critical care.

When Pedro Miguel was eventually admitted to the hospital, in addition to being severely malnourished he was found to have a heavy infestation of hook worms. The larvae of these parasites gain access to the body by penetrating the bare skin of the feet when they come in contact with dirt contaminated by feces of infested persons. Large numbers of hook worms in the intestine produce steady losses of protein and blood which, when combined with a meager potato and corn diet deficient in protein, results in classic kwashiorkor. Fortunately Pedro Miguel recovered well after receiving a transfusion of red blood cells (whole blood is not used because the heart is often weak in severely malnour-

### From the Editor

As a correspondent in Latin America for 14 years, I covered revolutions, elections, hurricanes, and a wide variety of other events. Yet, the single story that produced the most reaction was an op-ed feature for the *Wall Street Journal* describing how I learned to cook amidst the scarcity of Sandinista Nicaragua. Somehow the travails of bartering canned goods for live ducks and innovating sauces from abundant mangos managed to bring Nicaragua's daily realities home to a public tired of reading about war. Many of my readers observed that reading about my experiences made them realize the impact of the U.S.-sponsored low-intensity war in a more profound way.

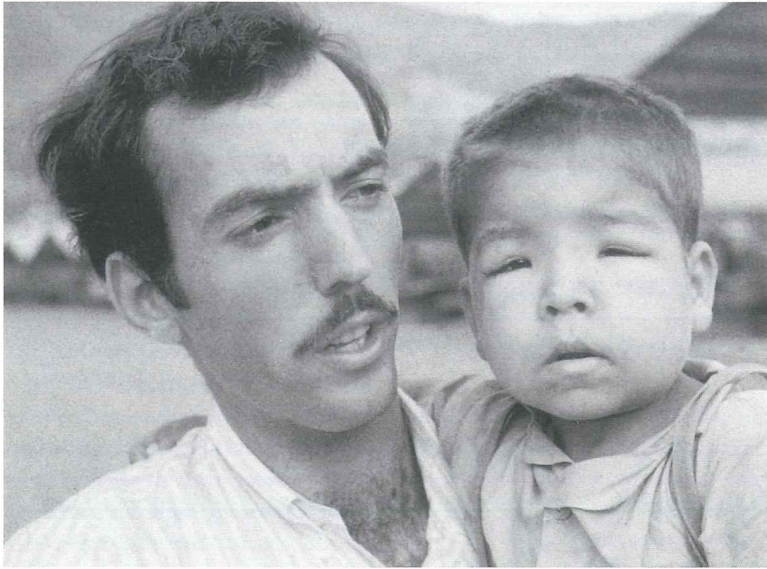
Food is not trivial. It is about life itself—as many of the articles on nutrition in this issue of DRCLAS NEWS—stress. It is also about culture, religion, gender roles, class structure, and globalization. Food history, as Schlesinger Library curator Barbara Haber told me, is now “hot,” going beyond women's history and gender studies into an emerging field of cultural studies.

When I began to ask friends and colleagues about their Latin American food experiences, practically everyone had a story to tell. Their stories (and recipes) are included in this issue; we know there are many other good tales out there. So if you feel your Latin American/Latin@ food story is worth telling, send me your tale to <jerlick@fas.harvard.edu>. We'll post the best contributions on our website.

Meanwhile, enjoy reading!!!

*Jane C. Elick*

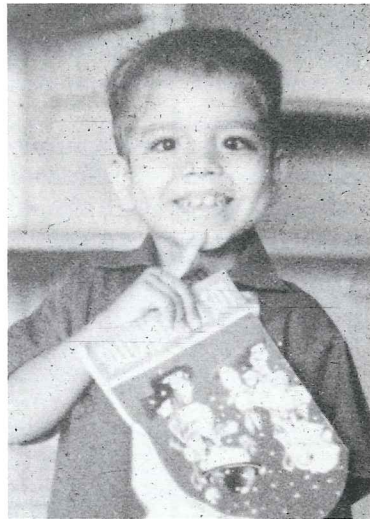




ished children and may "fail" if the volume of blood is rapidly expanded by transfusion) and a medicine to rid him of the hookworm. Over a period of two weeks the swelling disappeared, appetite returned and his mood improved.

When it was time to send him home the students realized the futility of their effort. To be sure, Pedro Miguel was given a pair of shoes, but he was not used to wearing them and probably would not wear them. In spite of the successful treatment Pedro Miguel was still poor and the circumstances leading to his illness had not changed. He was going back to his parents who even if more enlightened now were not better able to feed him a nourishing diet. He was returning to the same contaminated environment and to the same village destitute of medical care and even the most elementary of preventive services such as vaccination. But those problems were beyond the mandate of the medical establishment. A professor of Nutrition at the local University refused to lecture about protein/calorie malnutrition because he believed the subject belonged in Economics...he felt that the medical profession contributed little to the control of this very important pandemic by "medicalizing" the problem and failing to consider its roots in poverty and marginality.

Children like Pedro Miguel do not



grow well. If they reach adulthood, and many do not, they are shorter than less disadvantaged peers. Chronic hunger and each bout of infectious disease stunts their growth. The opportunity for catching up is denied to them by deficiency in the quality and quantity of diet available during convalescence. The prevalence of stunted children is a good proxy for the prevalence of the malnutrition-and-infection epidemic that still claims many lives in developing countries. Malnutrition contributes significantly to half of the deaths from diarrhea and respiratory infection and measles worldwide. The survivors are small in stature; they may look normal like those children surrounding Father Fernandez in the photograph, but they do not achieve

normal growth and their capacity for learning is reduced. Their diets are deficient in more than calories and protein; iron, vitamin A and other essential nutrients are also likely to be in short supply. Malnourished mothers give birth to low birth-weight babies who are much more likely to die during infancy. In Latin America they are called victims of "el síndrome pluricarenal de la infancia" or "multiple deficiencies syndrome of infancy."

Fortunately the malnutrition-infection pandemic is waning worldwide. The World Health Organization reports a decline in stunting world wide (defined as the proportion of children who fall below 2 standard deviations below the mean of the reference standard population) from 47% in 1980 to 33% in 2000. In Latin America and the Caribbean the rate of stunting declined from 27% in 1980 to 17% in 2000. Urbanization, development, improvement in female literacy and access to adequate diets and basic health care in some of the Caribbean countries and South America partially explain this welcome trend. Unfortunately the prevalence of stunting has not declined significantly where large indigenous populations remain at the margin of economic development or where armed conflict victimizes everyone, particularly the poor. Between 1980 and 2000 the prevalence of stunting in Central America declined only from 26 to 24 percent. There are no easy cures. Programs that target only one of the many problems faced by poor rural families are likely to reap limited success. Empowering target populations through education, basic health care, infrastructure development and access to work with just remuneration are essential steps towards reducing extreme poverty, a prerequisite for access to an adequate diet. Progress has been made in the hemisphere but much remains to be done.

The transition from rural to urban living which often translates into the transition from rural to urban pover-

Pedro Miguel with a Harvard Medical student in the early 1970's.

A picture of Pedro Miguel after he recovered.



ty is at the root of a new world-wide pandemic of chronic diseases that has not spared Latin America or the Latin American diaspora in the United States. Juan Mario Vásquez a fifty-year-old immigrant from Central America first came to the Spanish Clinic at Brigham and Women's Hospital four years ago complaining of headaches and frequent urination, a possible symptom of diabetes. Both his blood pressure and blood sugar were high. Vásquez had come to the U.S. 15 years earlier at which time his lifestyle changed drastically. Instead of walking or riding his bicycle (he had been a bicycle racer in his youth) he now drove a car; his diet was rich in red meat and rice but sparse in vegetables, whole grains and fruit. He had learned to eat fast and had gained 30 lbs. He also felt he had little leisure. Cholesterol was borderline high. He was not an unusual patient in any primary care practice in the US. After a complete medical evaluation which did not show any heart

problems, he was encouraged to eat more vegetables, black beans, fish, lean poultry, fruits, vegetable oil and whole grain breads while reducing as much as possible red meat, animal fat, sugar, potatoes and white rice.

### Acculturation entails dietary and other lifestyle changes.

He was also "prescribed" a return to cycling while acknowledging the possible side effects: injury or worse inflicted by Boston drivers. It worked. One year later Vásquez' blood pressure and blood glucose were normal without medication. He had lost 20 lbs and during the summer was averaging 90 miles per week on the bicycle.

Two years ago another patient, Felicio Valderrama, 46, developed fairly severe diabetes which required two different medications to control.

He accepted as a challenge the recommendation to loose weight and exercise. He began walking, and later jogging, one hour a day, five days per week and lost 12 pounds. His blood sugar has been normal for almost two years and he no longer needs medications. Unfortunately such success stories are rare. Valderrama is a chef who understands food preparation. He has made his new diet enjoyable and finds it somewhat reminiscent of the diet of his youth. He also had a sport which he loved as a young man which he can still practice and enjoy. Valderrama likes running, he is proud of having controlled diabetes and happy to share his experience with others.

Acculturation entails dietary and other lifestyle changes that have important health consequences including the risk of developing what has been termed the "metabolic syndrome" or syndrome x: obesity, diabetes, hypertension and eventually heart disease. Societies in rapid transition appear more vulnerable to the metabolic syndrome. Two factors seem to be involved: genetic predisposition and a new lifestyle that includes calorie-dense diets, physical inactivity and aging. The genetic basis of the syndrome is complex and there is evidence that a number of genes may be involved resulting in heterogeneous biological processes that reduce the effectiveness of insulin. Native Americans are particularly at risk once they adopt the western diet and life-style. In the United States Native Americans, African Americans and Latinos are disproportionately affected. One of every 17 persons in the US has adult onset diabetes (may also have other components of the syndrome) but only half as many have been diagnosed. The prevalence of adult diabetes among Latinos in the US is over twice the prevalence among non-Hispanic whites: Twenty five percent of US Latinos are diabetic or prediabetic by age 45 and 33% by age 65. Current projections are that by the year 2020 Latino and non-Hispanic Blacks will account for 80% of the total increase in the num-

A picture of 2 ten-year-old boys, one middle-class child, normal in height, one from poor rural area stunted over time





ber of diabetics between the ages of 20 and 70. As the Latino population ages, the number of diabetics will increase dramatically. Latinos are more likely to be diagnosed late and to have developed some complications by the time of diagnosis. A recent national survey (HAYNES III) showed that, once diagnosed, Latinos are less likely to be well controlled, thus increasing the likelihood of serious complications such as heart disease, blindness, amputation and renal failure requiring dialysis or kidney transplantation. Diabetes is enormously expensive to treat: 15% of health care dollars are spent treating diagnosed diabetics who comprise 7% of the general population. Adult onset diabetes, and very likely the associated components of syndrome X, are becoming a very serious health problem worldwide. Diabetes is most prevalent in industrialized nations, the Middle East and Latin America and the Caribbean. The rate in Latin America is higher than would be expected, considering the level of economic development and degree of urbanization in the region.

## THE TRADITIONAL HEALTHY LATIN-AMERICAN DIET PYRAMID

### DAILY BEVERAGE RECOMMENDATIONS

6 GLASSES  
OF WATER

WEEKLY

ALCOHOL  
IN MODERATION

MEAT  
SWEETS  
AND EGGS

DAILY

PLANT OILS  
DAIRY

POULTRY

FISH  
AND  
SHELLFISH

AT EVERY  
MEAL

WHOLE GRAINS,  
TUBERS, BEANS  
AND NUTS

FRUITS

VEGETABLES

DAILY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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## THE ART OF PERUVIAN CUISINE

Tony Custer, a graduate of Harvard in Economics with an MBA from Harvard Business School, is the editor and publisher of "The Art of Peruvian Cuisine." In 1998, Custer created "Aprendamos Juntos," a program that installs special classrooms with full-time therapists to help children with learning disabilities in Lima's poorest schools. All proceeds from the book go to the program; for further information, contact <facuster@cpg-peru.com.pe>. Custer hosted a dinner for members of Harvard lecturer Sylvia Maxfield's class travelling to Peru as election monitors in April 2001.

A sample from Custer's gastronomic tour of Peru

### Arroz a la Peruana

4 cups rice  
1/4 cup vegetable oil  
1 heaped tbsp minced garlic  
8 cups water  
2 tbsp butter  
3 cups fresh corn kernels, cooked  
salt to taste

The Spanish brought rice to Peru and first cultivated it in the coastal areas. Peruvians love rice and will eat it along with its Quechua equivalent, the potato. In fact few meals are complete without it. Rice and potato served together is the most permanently visible and most essential example of the fusion of Andean and European cuisines and ingredients.



### PREPARATION

In a large pan, heat the oil over medium heat and sauté the garlic for 2 or 3 minutes until cooked but not brown. Add rice and combine well. Cook, stirring for a couple more minutes. Season with salt and add water. Bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer, covered, on very low heat for 15 minutes. Then turn off heat and leave covered for five more minutes. Meanwhile, sauté the corn kernels in the butter. Remove lid from rice pan and add the corn kernels. Mix gently with a fork to separate grains and integrate the corn kernels. Spoon onto plates or use cup molds to form in individual servings.



In conclusion, a concerted effort is needed to continue to reduce protein energy malnutrition, particularly among children and pregnant women. Combating extreme poverty is the centerpiece of this endeavor since the vast majority of victims of protein-calorie malnutrition are the very poor and the very young in both rural and urban settings. Better education, infrastructure devel-

opment and more equitable distribution of opportunity and income should be the goals. It is also urgent to control the emerging epidemic of chronic disease in Latin America. In the US, health care budgets are being strained by the use of high technology to treat the consequences of syndrome X: coronary artery disease and the complications of diabetes such as renal failure. Latin America can-

not afford such expenditures. The challenge is prevention. It will require better understanding of the genetics of syndrome X. It will also require behavior change and a change in the new urban diet. We need to devise practical ways to counter the habit of sitting in front of televisions instead of keeping physically active. We need to engage educators, economists, anthropologists and urban planners in addition to health professionals to bring about change in the lifestyle of the new city dwellers. We need to increase access to a healthy diet, rooted perhaps in Latin American culinary traditions such as the one proposed by Oldways and summarized in the Latin American Diet Pyramid. Otherwise we risk going from the frying pan into the fire.

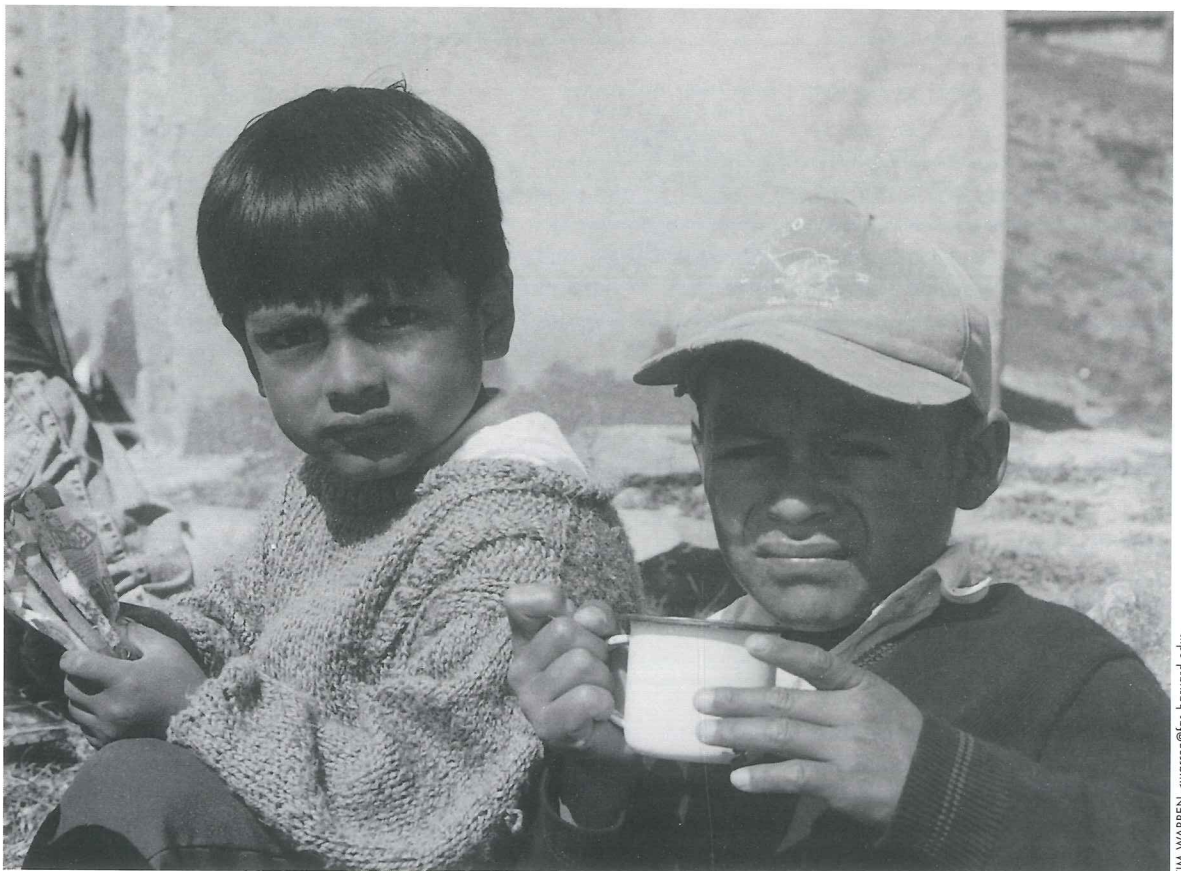
*Manuel Guillermo Herrera-Acena is a Senior Lecturer on Nutrition, Harvard School of Public Health; a Lecturer at Harvard Medical School, and Director of the Spanish Clinic, Brigham and Women's Hospital.*

A child eats fruit in Managua, Nicaragua.



ANITA BACA <abaca@expressnews.com>

Children in Ecuador sip their daily beverage.



TIM WARREN <warren@fas.harvard.edu>





Boy with rooster:  
food distribution is an  
income supplement.

ANITA BACA -cbaca@expressnews.com>

## AN AZTEC REMEDY

Lois Wasserspring was feeling sick, really sick; her entire body was aching and she thought she was going to die. It was 1968, and Wasserspring, a former DRCLAS visiting scholar who is co-director of Latin American Studies and faculty director of Internships in Costa Rica at Wellesley College, was doing thesis research in the small village of Tepoztlán, Mexico.

It was a golden opportunity to spend a year living with a family in an interesting—and famous—village which anthropologist Redfield had studied in the 20s, and Oscar Lewis in the 40s. In Morelos state, not far from its capital, Cuernavaca, Tepoztlán had become home to the young graduate student.

Now all she wanted to do was go home or, at the very least, not die. She had never felt so awful in her life. Señora Moreno, her host mother, patiently applied plantain leaves to the soles of her feet. They didn't work; Wasserspring felt as if she were burning up. Somewhere in her fog, she heard her host mother say to some other women, "Let's try the ancient Aztec remedy."

She heard the women in the kitchen and then some sort of squealing or squawking and then a silence. She was afraid. This was going to be some sort of horrible animal sacrifice and she would have to drink blood or who knows what. She was sick enough as it were. And she couldn't be offending cultural sensibilities. What kind of awful Aztec remedy would she have to undergo?

She waited forever, drifting in and out of sleep. And then her host mother emerged from the kitchen with a large bowl. And it smelled good and somehow very familiar. Wasserspring reached for the bowl.

It was chicken soup. The squawking had been the butchering of a chicken.

And the funny thing was that the ancient Aztec remedy—a crosscultural solution, if there ever was one, to a myriad of sicknesses—actually seemed to work! The next day, she felt much better and eager to move ahead with her thesis.

—JCE





# What Food? Who Eats It? Why Does It Matter?

*Food for Thought*

BY JOHN H. COATSWORTH

**S**EARCHING FOR FOOD—TOGETHER WITH GROWING, cooking, and eating it—has consumed more time than any human activity except sleeping for most of human history. Curiously, historians have never devoted as much attention to the feeding of multitudes as they have to the ceremonial and predatory behavior of tiny minorities. And even so, we often seem to know much more about the symbols and rituals of power than about what the powerful had for supper (or about the folks whose labor fed them).

The history of agriculture and nutrition—the food history—of Latin America makes fascinating reading. It begins with the migration of hunters, gatherers, and fishers from northern Asia during the last Ice Age, which ended about 12,000 BCE. It includes the late transition to sedentary agriculture—about 3,000 BCE or so in the New World versus 9,000 in the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East. New World populations took longer to develop agriculture in part because the more abundant wildlife in relation to humans made hunting, gathering, and fishing more productive for a longer time. Another reason is that trial-and-error genetic engineering was much more difficult to accomplish with the wild plants (like maize and potatoes) of the New World than with the food grains developed in the Old. Moreover, agriculture had to wait

until humans migrated to the mineral-rich soils of mountain valleys and plateaus, away from the quickly exhausted soils of the tropical lowlands where fish and game had been more abundant.

When the Spanish conquerors arrived in the New World, they found that the agriculture supporting the great cities and states of Mesoamerica differed from that of the Andes. In Mexico and Central America, maize (corn) and beans (*frijoles*) constituted the staples of a diet that also included squash, hot peppers (chiles), and a variety of other fruits and vegetables unknown in Europe. In the Andes, they found a more diverse agriculture in which potatoes and other root crops often predominated. The Andean diet did not include the large number and variety of chiles found in Mexico, but included more animal protein. Mesoamerica had no domesticated animals—horses and camels probably originated in the New World, but died out during the same Ice Age that brought in humans. In South America, however, the indigenous peoples domesticated the surviving camelid species: alpacas, llamas, and vicuñas.

In the aftermath of the Spanish and Portuguese conquests and colonization of the New World, a “Columbian Exchange” of plants and animals took place on a large scale. Tragically, the first of the Old World imports were

Left: girl being  
measured; right:  
child being weighed  
in clinic



ANÍA BARCIAK, SOCIOS EN SALUD



ARMANDO WAAK, PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION



microscopic in size but catastrophic in their impact. Smallpox, pneumonia, influenza, and many diseases unknown in the New World literally killed millions as pathogens spread throughout the hemisphere. Historical demographers place the pre-Conquest Native American population at 50-70 million. From 1492 to the early 1600s, the population fell to less than five million.

Meanwhile, a vast transformation of diets had begun in the Old World as well as the New. Since the Old World produced some 500 of the 640 domesticated plants and 12 of the 14 domesticated animal species developed by humans up to 1492, biodiversity increased more in the New World than in the Old. The Old World supplied food grains (wheat, barley, rye, oats), chickpeas, melons, onions, cabbages, cauliflowers, olives, radishes, orchard fruits of all kinds (apples, peaches, bananas, oranges and lemons), grapes, rice, and sugar cane. Even more significant (and at times destructive) were the animals: sheep, cattle, horses, donkeys, pigs, goats, and chickens.

The New World foods that reached the Old were fewer in number, but they spread widely and some became dietary staples in vast areas. Chief among the New World crops adopted by the Old were maize (corn), many varieties of beans, potatoes, yams, tomatoes, peanuts, coffee, cacao, tobacco, manioc, squashes, and rubber.

Major portions of the "authentic" and "native" cuisines of both the Old World and the New consist of foods that only penetrated local diets long after the dietary globalization touched off by the voyages of Columbus.

We know much less about the history of agricultural productivity and nutrition until recent times. What evidence there is suggests that both output and nutrition levels were low by European standards among the sedentary agriculturalists of the New World, especially in central Mexico. As in other agricultural populations, those of the New World combined low levels of nutrition with correspondingly low levels of exertion. Subjection to Old World work rhythms probably increased the mortality rates. Only the lucky few who survived the pandemics benefited from the increase in agricultural productivity that resulted from new food sources and the sometimes forced resettlement of rural populations away from marginal areas and onto the most productive lands.

Most governments did not start collecting data on income distribution or poverty until sometime in this century. For earlier centuries, historians now use data on the average (mean) height or stature of a population. Stature provides an excellent measure of "net nutrition," that is, total or gross nutrition minus what is needed to ward off disease and work for a living. This is because human stature at equal levels of net nutrition does not vary from one racial or ethnic group to another (even though individual height can vary).



CONTRAMAGEN, GABRIEL OSORIO <contramagen30@hotmail.com>

### Efforts to alleviate nutrition deficits in Latin America have varied in design and effectiveness.

The widespread myth in Latin America that indigenous peoples are genetically shorter than Europeans or mestizos is false. Differences in height between population groups are due mainly to differences in net nutrition, especially in the first three years of childhood and during adolescent growth spurts. Where children and adolescents are exposed to more disease, lack access to adequate medical care, or engage in stressful or strenuous work, more nutrition is needed to achieve the same stature.

Differences in the stature of racial, ethnic, and social groups in Latin America, like anywhere else, are mainly attributable to differences in net nutrition. Such differences used to be common in today's developed countries. In 1800, the titled nobility of England stood a full five inches taller than the English population as a whole. Today, the difference is less than one inch and scarcely noticeable. Aristocrats and commoners are both taller today than in 1800, but the benefits of better diet were concentrated at the lower end of the income scale.

In 1800, the English population consumed a little more than 2,000 calories per day, slightly less than the average for Latin America today. At this level, historians have estimated that roughly 20 percent of the adult population was too malnourished to work. Of the 80 percent available for work, most could not have worked at anything like the intensity of the modern workplace.

Improved nutrition helped fuel the British economy. Economic historian Robert William Fogel, in his Nobel Prize Lecture in 1994, estimated that 30 percent of the increase in the per capita product of Great Britain between 1790 and 1980 was due solely to improvements in gross nutrition. Improvements in public health and access to medical care made additional contributions to growth by enabling people to use more calories for work because they needed fewer to fight disease.

Some programs rely on distributing food or food certificates to low income families.



In contrast, many contemporary Native-American farmers in Mesoamerica and the Andes continue to survive at nutrition levels close to that of the conquest era. Though life expectancy on average has increased from less than 40 years to over 70 in most of Latin America, the health and nutrition statistics for indigenous and other marginalized groups have lagged behind. In Mexico, for example, the average height of indigenous villagers in some areas in the south of the country, is comparable to that of the pre-Conquest era. The same is true in some highland areas of the Andes.

## AJIACO, BOGOTÁ'S CHICKEN AND POTATO SOUP

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 chicken breasts
- garlic and onion
- 12 small yellow potatoes, halved
- 2 ears of corn, cut in half
- 8 medium potatoes, peeled and sliced
- 1 bunch scallions
- 1 bunch cilantro
- 8 tbsp. guascas
- 1 cup of heavy cream
- 2 tbsp. capers
- 2 avocados, peeled, pitted, and thinly sliced



Marinate the chicken breasts in garlic, onion, and salt to taste the night before. Cover the breasts with water in a heavy casserole and cook until tender. Remove chicken skin and slice breasts into strips. Cook yellow potatoes in chicken stock until they start to disintegrate. Add more chicken stock to taste, plus scallions, cilantro, potatoes, guascas, and corn. When cooked, remove cilantro and scallions. Pour the chicken stock over the chicken in large soup bowls. Add 3 tbsp. of cream, a tsp. of capers, and sliced avocado to each bowl. Serves four.

Liliana Obregón, a doctoral candidate in the Human Rights and International Law Program at Harvard Law School, contributed this recipe, which she found on the Internet, <[http://home.xnet.com/~cadena/index\\_colombia.html](http://home.xnet.com/~cadena/index_colombia.html)>. One of the founders of the Colombian Colloquium, an ongoing forum on Colombia supported by DRCLAS and the MIT Colombian Students Association, Obregón confesses that the recipe is merely a guide. The "secret" is in a package, a soup mix manufactured by La Sopera in Colombia. The mix contains *guascas*, the traditional herb used to make *ajiaco*, and forms a base for the stew.

As more and more Latin American women moving into the professional world look for shortcuts, and as immigrants yearn for tastes of their homeland, there's an increased market for these "convenience" foods. In Guatemala, one can find packages for *hilachas* and *jocón* and in Mexico, for *mole*. These kitchen helpers move easily across borders and make home cooking possible for those stressed not only by time, but by the inaccessibility of ingredients.

A special thanks for sharing the secret of the *ajiaco* package (and sometimes the packages themselves) on more than one festive occasion!

—JCE

Throughout Latin America, despite enormous advances in agricultural technology and technique, nutrition levels for entire countries and regions are so low that physical stature, ability to work a full day or at modern levels of intensity, and even intellectual capacities are severely compromised. The United Nations Development Programme, citing government statistics, reports that the average caloric intake of the region as a whole is close to 2700 per day (versus 3600 in the United States), but less than 1900 in Peru and Haiti, 2100 in Bolivia and Panama, and 2300 in Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. In other countries, such as Brazil and Mexico, regional disparities in nutrition and poor nutrition have left large areas in a similar condition. Malnutrition and poor nutrition is exacerbated by inequality, poor or absent health care, and the high incidence of preventable diseases due to poor sanitation.

At such low levels of nutrition, substantial numbers of adults are unable to work full time or as intensively as modern economies require. Among the 38 percent of the Latin American population classified as "poor," that is, with a daily income equivalent to less than two U.S. dollars, malnutrition and undernourishment are widespread. The risk to children is also particularly high among such populations.

Efforts to alleviate nutrition deficits in Latin America have varied in design and effectiveness. Some programs, such as Mexico's Progres, concentrate on the poorest citizens and provide a variety of services and subsidies. Others attempt to reach larger population groups, but with fewer resources per person. Policy analysts and administrators are constantly searching for ways to enhance the impact of the limited resources devoted to such efforts. Some programs rely on distributing food or food certificates to low income families, like the food stamp program in the United States. Others rely on broader schemes involving welfare payments, job-creation, or school-related benefits. In some cases, programs have emphasized health and nutrition education, though such efforts risk failure where family incomes are not sufficient to purchase better balanced diets. None have proved adequate to the magnitude of Latin America's problems in this area.

For the foreseeable future, it appears, Latin America is not likely to achieve more than gradual improvements in overall nutrition as the benefits of economic growth and modest government programs trickle down. Slower growth, as in the stagnant decade of the 1980s, or in the recession just underway now, reverse progress and increase the nutrition deficit affecting much of the region's population. Until both political will and adequate resources can be found, Latin America's economic modernization will remain stunted by the lost productivity of much of the region's undernourished population.

*John H. Coatsworth is the Monroe Gutman Professor of Latin American Affairs and director of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies.*



ALL PHOTOS THIS STORY (UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED): OTTO SOLBRIG

Agricultural terraces,  
Venezuela

# Sustainable Agriculture

*Its Impact on the World Food Situation*

BY OTTO T. SOLBRIG

**F**AMINE AND UNDERNOURISHMENT are not due to lack of food availability. Rather they result from the inability of people to grow their own food or to purchase it from those who grow it. In other words, famine and undernourishment are symptoms rather than the cause of poverty.

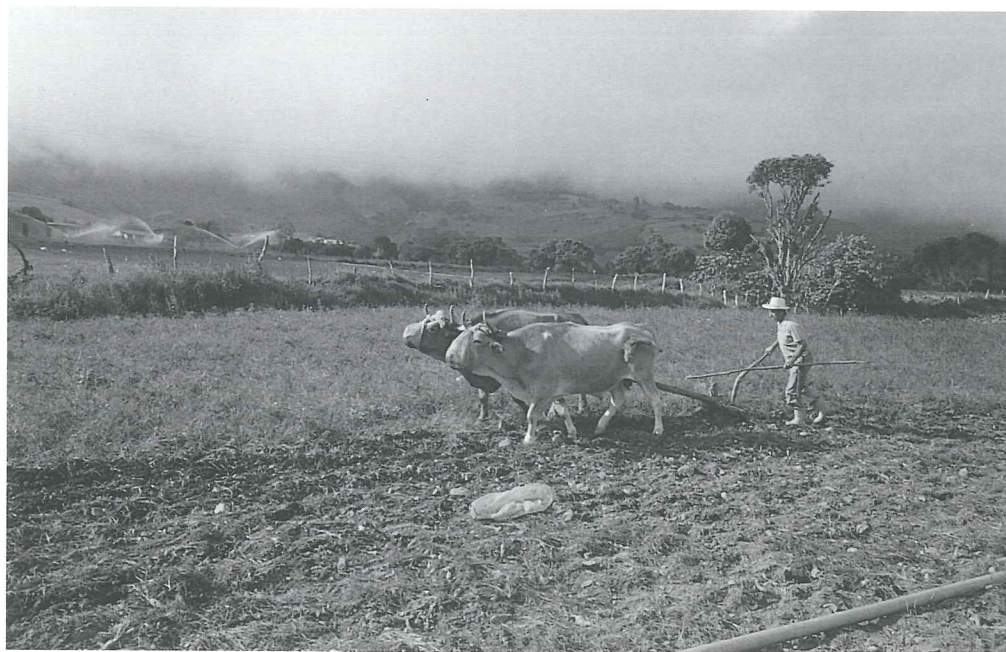
There is enough productive capacity in the world to feed all people adequately. However, there is not enough capability—or enough political will—to pay for the cost of feeding everyone. The problem of undernourishment is due to the maldistribution of income in the world, both within nations and between nations. In the United States, the average caloric consumption is 3600 Kcal per person daily (Kcal= 1000 calories, a measure

of the energy contained in food), approximately 1000 Kcal over the recommended amount. In some countries consumption is below 2000 Kcal per person daily, well below the minimum of 2300 Kcal needed to sustain a healthy body. Undernourished people are unable to work as much as well fed ones, undernourished children are unable to study, undernourished persons are more prone to disease, and have a short life expectancy. No wonder then that with average annual incomes of less than \$500 per person yearly, some countries have average caloric consumption below 2000 Kcal/person/day, life expectancies below 50 years and infant mortality rates in excess of 150 for each 1000 live births!

As we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we

encounter a paradox since there never have been as many undernourished people as today—it is also true that the world has never been better fed. The answer to the riddle is population growth. Over the last 40 years the human population grew at an unprecedented rate. Consequently the absolute number of undernourished people increased to close to 800 million. Yet food production and consumption grew at a faster rate than population (see the graph, p.16), resulting in a diminution of the proportion of undernourished people from 17% 40 years ago to approximately 12.5% today. Nevertheless, the absolute numbers are appallingly high. The only comfort that can be had from these numbers is the steady progress that has been made





in reducing the proportion of undernourished people.

#### THE LATIN AMERICAN SITUATION

The food situation in Latin America also has improved over the last forty years. Average caloric intake in the region has gone from 2170 to 2533 Kcal/person/day a 17% increase; protein consumption has increased from 58g. protein/person/day to 66g. protein/person/day, a 12% increase, and fat consumption increased from 47g. fat/person/day to 71 g.fat/person/day, a 49% increase. All this improvement took place in spite of a 137% population increase in the last forty years, one of the largest in the world that saw the population more than double in this period. While the food statistics in the aggregate are encouraging, they hide a great deal of variation between and within countries.

Ten countries (Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Paraguay, Colombia, and El Salvador, in that order) out of the nineteen countries analyzed had average calorie consumption above 2500 Kcal/person/day; six had average consumption between 2200 and 2500 Kcal/person/day (Panama, Honduras, Guatemala, Venezuela, Peru and the Dominican Republic), and three (Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Haiti) had average caloric consumption below

2200 Kcal/person/day. Actual caloric needs vary with age, size, gender, and type of work. Most experts feel that 2200 Kcal/day is a minimum need, and that 2500 Kcal/person/day is a

“We cannot revert to  
a gentler type of  
agriculture.... The  
challenge then is to find  
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high input agriculture  
more sustainable.”

more adequate figure. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization uses 2750 Kcal/person/day as the figure to determine whether a country has a problem of malnourishment. Only five countries (Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Chile) fall in that category. Yet in 1961 only two countries (Argentina and Uruguay) were in that category; one (Mexico) had average caloric consumption over 2500 but below 2750, three (Chile, Brazil, and Paraguay) had average caloric consumption between 2200 and 2750, while all other republics were below

that level. Six (Honduras, Haiti, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Bolivia, and El Salvador) had consumption values below 2000 Kcal/person/day (only one—Haiti—has such a low value today). Improvement in the last forty years has on average been significant in spite of a very fast growth rate, but too many countries still have problems. And given the great disparities of incomes within countries, even in places such as Argentina with adequate average consumption values, there are still a large number of poor and inadequately fed persons.

#### WHAT HAS CHANGED IN THE LAST FORTY YEARS?

The improvement in the level of food consumption is related to the improvement in economic conditions around the world in the last forty years that increased demand for food, as well as some technological advances in agriculture that have resulted in a significant reduction of food prices. In other words, both the demand and the supply of food have increased over the last forty years.

The supply is directly related to some simple—but very important—changes in the production of food, what is generally known as the “green revolution.” The green revolution consists basically of the development





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of high yielding varieties (HYV) of cereals, particularly wheat and rice, capable of responding very favorably to nitrogenous fertilizer. Other advances were the development of chemical insecticides and herbicides, and the mechanization of agricultural practices. The increased yields reduced unit costs and were translated into cheaper market prices. Massive subsidies to farmers in Japan, Europe and the United States also increased production and reduced prices, thereby contributing to the reduction of malnutrition.

Yet the green revolution has come under a great deal of criticism, some of it perhaps justified, much of it not, and most of it based on ignorance. Probably because food is such a basic necessity, discussions regarding food are charged with ideological overtones. Let us analyze some of the criticism.

One set of criticisms of the green revolution is social. It is maintained by some that the green revolution has only favored large and rich farms. It is undoubtedly true that the more progressive and educated farmers, and those with access to capital, were the first to adopt the green revolution and that they benefited handsomely. This is so whenever a new technology is introduced: those willing to take the risk will benefit more than those that are not early adopters, if the tech-

nology succeeds. However, the new technology also may fail, and in that case risk takers will suffer more than non-adopters. And it is also undoubtedly true that larger and richer farmers are better situated to take risks. Yet many small and poor farmers throughout the third world who were early adopters also benefited greatly, and in large measure are today bigger and richer. But it is also true that there were many losers: small farmers that were unable to compete and lost their land, as well as landless peasants that were replaced by machinery.

A second kind of criticism comes from ecologists. They point out that the green revolution led to monocropping, and resulted in increased soil erosion and chemical contamination of soil and water. Furthermore, the use of genetically uniform HYV reduced genetic diversity and resulted in the loss of genetically diverse land races.

The new technologies, especially the use of chemical fertilizer, permit farmers to grow a smaller set of crops and to grow them year after year. Market prices will determine which crops are the most lucrative ones in each region. There is no doubt that monocropping is detrimental to the soil and increases the pest and disease load. The response of farmers to this problem is often to increase chemical

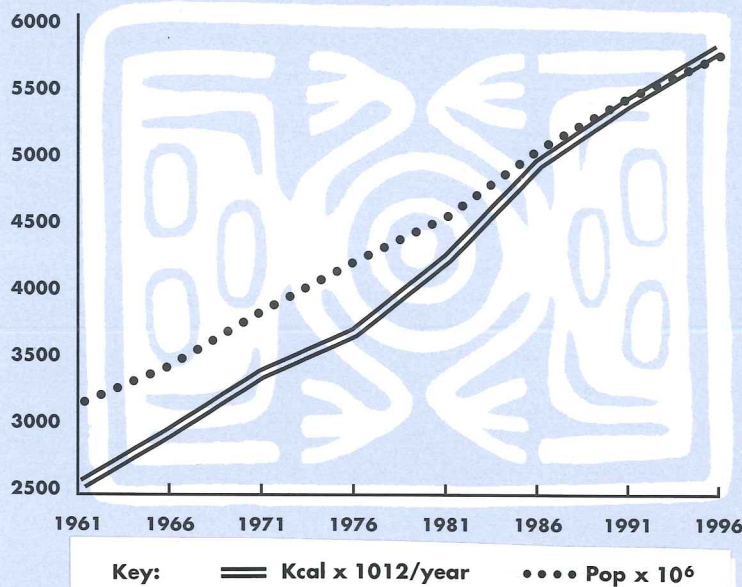
warfare, which only makes matters worse. Yet as problems developed, farmers and agronomists became aware of the dangers involved. This has resulted in the development of a number of new technologies, collectively known as "process technologies." Examples are direct seeding (also known as no-till agriculture) that significantly reduces soil erosion; the use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) a technique to combat insect pests by using natural predators; reducing the use of fertilizers and using slow-release pellets rather than liquid fertilizer; increasing crop rotation; and drip-irrigation to conserve water. Farmers are increasingly adopting these technologies, and they should improve and hopefully correct the ecological problems. New varieties obtained by non-conventional means (biotechnology) are resistant to particular insect pests and diseases, and will help reduce the use of pesticides significantly. Other issues, such as the loss of genetic diversity are being addressed by international organizations through the building and maintenance of seed banks.

Agriculture and livestock raising—both conventional and high input—are the human activities that most affect the natural environment. The vegetation and the fauna are drastically reduced, hydrological patterns

Left: Plowing with oxen, state of Mérida, Venezuela; middle: cornfield, state of Goiás, Brazil; right: man harvesting strawberries in Costa Rica



## FOOD AND POPULATION



Food production and consumption grew at a faster rate than population. Trends are shown in chart at right; to obtain exact figures, multiply as indicated in key.

## CALORIE CONSUMPTION

COUNTRY	KCAL		PROTEIN		FAT	
	1961	1997	1961	1997	1961	1997
Argentina	3,116	3,093	105.75	94.94	95.15	109.93
Uruguay	2,814	2,816	87.31	84.26	110.47	103.74
Mexico	2,525	3,097	65.66	82.54	55.51	87.57
Chile	2,476	2,796	65.35	77.18	53.09	82.13
Brazil	2,216	2,974	56.34	76.43	38.1	84.04
Paraguay	2,208	2,566	69.42	76.93	49.44	78.75
Nicaragua	2,195	2,186	64.6	48.94	35.45	46.45
Venezuela	2,165	2,321	54.54	58.97	52.44	65.78
Peru	2,140	2,302	54.95	60.19	37.3	49.84
Costa Rica	2,125	2,649	52.16	67.85	46.97	79.54
Panama	2,121	2,430	53.45	65.42	41.88	68.15
Colombia	2,075	2,600	47.32	63.07	38.58	65.05
Ecuador	2,022	2,679	50.2	59.32	47.35	97.84
Honduras	1,987	2,403	53.96	57.63	33.13	61.89
Haiti	1,942	1,869	44.07	41.02	26.23	40.1
Guatemala	1,895	2,339	53.54	60.52	32.76	45.8
Dominican Republic	1,753	2,288	38.21	50.02	35.44	74.15
Bolivia	1,748	2,174	46.68	56.52	34.87	56.84
El Salvador	1,720	2,562	45.55	63.48	38.79	55.07
Average	2171	2534	58.37	65.53	47.52	71.19

are disrupted, and soil is modified. Ecologically, agriculture is equivalent to moving the natural succession to an early stage, characterized by higher productivity, but also less stability and less resilience. In a natural situation, as the ecosystem matures, nutrient leaching is reversed; stability and resilience increases, and productivity is reduced. To maintain the high productivity of agriculture while increasing stability of the cropping system, farmers invest in energy demanding activities such as irrigation, fertilization, and herbicide and pesticide applications. The only way to avoid these inputs is to revert to a traditional agriculture such as was practiced two centuries ago. The problem then is yields: modern agriculture is ten times more productive than the traditional kind; productivity is defined as the amount of edible crop per unit of surface.

It also uses very little labor. American agriculture employs only 2% of the U.S. labor force, releasing most of us to be employed in more lucrative industrial or service occupations.

We therefore cannot revert to a gentler type of agriculture without increasing undernourishment. Modern high input agriculture is necessary in order to feed the world and it is succeeding as we have seen. It has been pointed out that small, traditional peasants are sometimes able to be very productive using less fertilizer (and much of what they use being organic), minor amounts of pesticides and no herbicides. They replace these inputs with labor. This approach does not necessarily increase ecological stability but may produce acceptable yields. Each farmer cultivates a small plot and many more persons are required for the same area of land compared to the present system. Furthermore, peasant farmers benefit from the assistance of large urban populations and their activities: cheap tools, transport, and market. If a majority of the population were to go back to the land, and become traditional farmers, who would provide the needed modern infrastructure? And where would the



market be? Let us also remember that being a traditional peasant is back-breaking work that leaves little time for other activities, especially education and culture.

The challenge then is to find ways to make modern high input agriculture more sustainable. We also must remember that farmers are in business, and that their objective is to maximize profits, by reducing unnecessary costs and making investments to increase yields. Most farmers are interested in protecting their land and feel very strongly in favor of conservation agriculture. Yet they cannot afford compromising the income stream on which they and their families depend. Process technologies, biotechnology, and genetically modified crops all cost money and will be adopted only if they increase profits. The challenge is therefore as follows: to find new technologies that are more profitable and also more environmentally friendly. Finding such techniques will not be easy, but not impossible as the success of no-till agriculture shows.

Finally, sustainability is not only an ecological and agronomic issue. It is above all else a social issue. In order to be sustainable, the new technologies must be socially acceptable and improve equity. The benefits of



Farm on the Venezuelan plains.

sustainable agriculture must be equitably distributed and must benefit the society at large. Otherwise, society will eventually repudiate a system that favors only a small elite.

As the agricultural world gets ready to feed an additional two billion persons in the next 35 to 50 years, the challenge will be to find ways to keep increasing yields so as to feed the growing population; to increase the profits of farmers so that they can stay in business and enjoy the fruits of their labor; and to find meaningful employment for all the rural population.

*Otto T. Solbrig, Harvard's Bussey Professor of Biology, is co-author of Globalization and the Rural Environment, recently published by the David Rockefeller Series on Latin American Studies/Harvard University Press. He is also a member of the Executive Committee of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and served as the Acting Director of the Center in 2000. His research includes population ecology and natural resource use, especially renewable resources in Latin America.*

## FOOD AND CULTURE: Anthropology 105

Harvard Anthropology Professor James L. Watson amiably admits he's not a Latin Americanist. As a matter of fact, at this writing, he was preparing for his very first trip to Mexico.

But as Harvard's expert on culinary anthropology, he knew a lot about what he would be looking for: traditional markets and vendors, the penetration of fast food chains such as McDonald's and, yes, Taco Bell, as well as sampling the local cuisine.

Watson, the editor of *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia* (Stanford University Press, 1997), focuses on food issues, a specialized subfield of social/cultural anthropology in his course Food and Culture, Anthropology 105. The course examines food for its social and cultural implications, rather than being a survey of nutritional or dietetic sciences.

The only course of its type at Harvard, Anthropology 105 includes topics such as food in social contexts, gift giving and reciprocity, food as a marker of social boundaries, body image and the symbolism of human fat, transnationalism and global food industries, and the invention and commodification of new foods.

Students—who have included a fair share of Latin Americans and Latin@s—choose research topics from a wide variety of themes, many of them international, such as "Drawing Ethnic Boundaries with Food," "The Structure of Italian/Hungarian/Japanese/Brazilian/Greek/Cuban/English Cuisine," "Overeating as a Cultural Expectation," "Food Fit for the Gods: Feeding and Eating in Religious Contexts," and "Is there a Global Cuisine? Fast Foods in Transnational Contexts."

Want to read more about food and culture? Watson recommends *Food and Culture: A Reader*, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (Routledge, 1997); *The Lord's Table: The Meaning of Food in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), and *Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture* (Waveland Press, 1998).

And now we're waiting for a report from Mexico!

—JCE





# From Big to Small, Toxic to Green

*New Strategies to Grow Food in Cuba*

BY MINOR SINCLAIR

**A**GRICULTURAL POLICY IN CUBA HAS NOT LACKED IN audacity. From the wide-sweeping land reforms of 1959 and 1962, to the disastrous drive for a 10 million ton sugar harvest in 1970, to the banning of all farmers' markets in 1986, policy changes tend to be grandiose. Over the past ten years agriculture policy and practices have taken another dramatic turn—this time emphasizing food production. By re-opening farmers' markets, decentralizing production and giving birth to ecological agriculture, the state has let go of old practices and ushered in new thinking. In doing so, Cuba, which occupies 40% of the land mass of the entire Caribbean, offers major lessons on how a developing country can respond

to crisis—on its own terms.

Through the 1900s, Cuban agriculture largely was defined by sugar. Under the Castro government, as long as sugar could be traded to the Soviets and eastern Bloc nations in exchange for cheap oil, the objective was to produce as much sugar as possible no matter the inefficiencies or environmental cost. The high input, highly mechanized model was "sustainable" only in the narrow sense that the sugar for oil deal sustained its inefficiency. Cuban agriculture was a toxic, energy-devouring, land-degrading machine. Annually Cuba imported 1.3 million tons of chemical fertilizers, 17,000 tons of herbicides and 10,000 tons of pesticides. By 1989 Cuban farms were using twice the amount of fertilizers as US farms used, with proportionally three times the amount of land under irrigation and with comparable rates of mechanization.

A decade ago, a deep economic crisis swept rural Cuba like a level-five hurricane. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc in eastern Europe caused Cuba to lose 80% of its imports. Farmers had no fuel for the tractors, no fertilizers or pesticides for the fields and no spare parts for the pumps. Agricultural production—and almost everything else—ground practically to a halt. The loss of foreign exchange meant that Cuba could not import the basic food stuffs to sometimes provide even the minimum for its population. The government could no longer provide enough food for the people. Cuba was on the border of total collapse.

With literally no other options—little international aid and foreign investment, insufficient food imports, scarce domestic capital—Cuban policy makers and Cuban farmers turned agriculture upside down in order to produce food for the population. "The only ideological battle," reads a sign hanging over an organic garden, "is to produce more food." The words, significantly, are attributed to Raúl Castro, the Minister of Armed Forces and a known ideologue. Recognizing that large state farms do not work, in 1993 the government broke up most of them and turned over 40% of the country's arable land to a new kind of farmers' cooperative (known as Basic Units of Cooperative Production—UBPC). In 1994 the government re-opened farmers' markets which use unregulated prices, an action once considered anathema to centralized planning. And perhaps the most surprising, the Ministry of Agriculture and farmers throughout Cuba have turned to small scale, low input food production techniques which stand in a marked contrast to the high input model of the 1970s and 1980s.

Today the situation has changed dramatically. Agricultural markets are filled with produce and bustling with



MIGUEL TRELES



vendors and buyers. Farmers have responded to strong market incentives and stepped up production. The UBPCs are more efficient than the state farms and have drastically reduced state subsidies for agriculture. Garden plots in the cities now produce half of all the vegetables in the country. And perhaps unprecedented in Latin America and the Caribbean, urban people are moving back to the farms as a reverse migration flow.

The production figures have been fairly impressive, particularly given the obstacles (including the hardening of US sanctions against Cuba in 1993 and again in 1995). The per capital daily caloric intake has climbed 33% to 2473 kilocalories over the past five years after dropping from 2908 to 1863 in the previous five years (2500 is the minimum recommended). According to the figures from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO):

- production of tubers and plantains more than tripled from 1994-1999
- vegetable production doubled from 1994 to 1998 and then doubled again in 1999
- potato production increased from 188,000 metric tons in 1994 to 330,000 in 1998

Unfortunately the recovery has not been across the board. Animal-sourced protein production remains close to the depressed 1994 levels and considerably less than levels of production in the 1980s.

The changes in agricultural policy in Cuba offer particular insights to other developing countries. Not only has production increased, but also the restructuring of the agricultural system occurred without social dislocations—small farmers have not lost their land or livelihood and working classes have gained better access to food (albeit at higher prices). That scenario is highly attractive to Latin America and Caribbean countries where restructuring has caused enormous distress to small producers. Of the reforms most “transferable,” the ecological practices merit much greater scrutiny.

Sustainable development practices were initially resisted by the Ministry of Agriculture. One Cuban Ph.D. in agriculture saw the practices as “a return to the oxen and plows of the Middle Ages;” others perhaps perceived a threat to the control of the bureaucracy. That has now changed. “I don't believe many people know how big organic farming in Cuba really is,” declared Juan José Leon Vega, director of international relations at the Ministry of Agriculture. He estimated 3.7 million acres of the 6.2 million acres of non-sugar farmland are organic. Cuba presently imports one-sixth of the fertilizers and even fewer chemical herbicides and pesticides compared to the pre-1989 Soviet era.

Key to ecological agriculture is diversification—not only in markets, land tenure and types of producers, but in production itself. According to Roberto Caballeros,

an agricultural specialist with the Institute Dimitrova, there has been a convergence between the economic necessities to reduce the scale of agriculture and the environmental suitability of smaller scale, diversified agriculture. “The tropical climate of an island like Cuba,” he says, “is inherently unstable and on a large scale model, the farmer cannot react in time to changes in climate.” By planting multiple crops, rotating the crops, integrating animals and agriculture, many farmers have adapted to the new circumstances. They are more responsive to the market, are less susceptible to major losses, make better use of their resources and engage in more environmentally-sound practices.

While before the economic crisis, most cooperatives and state farms were dedicated exclusively to the production of a single crop, today nearly all farms produce food alongside their cash crop. It is not unusual for a cooperative, like “El Vaquerito” in Moron, Ciego de Avila, to earn more from its sideline of “auto-consumo” than from its principal production of coffee or sugar or cattle. Jorge Luis Hernández, the president of El Vaquerito said, “Whoever holds onto mono-culture will sink. The key is diversification.” Without the ag inputs, the sugar yields are half of what

they were in the 1980s, yet the cooperative continues to make a profit because of diversification. In addition to sugar cane, the cooperative plants 65 acres of fruits and vegetables and tubers, tends 5,000 coffee trees and 1,000 cacao trees, and raises 400 head of cattle and 150 pigs. They make their own animal feed out of their honey, grains, their cultivated fish and waste products of the sugar. “We've been able to keep the boat afloat,” remarked Hernández after seven years at the helm of the cooperative.

Urban agriculture may be the crown jewel of Cuba's drive towards sustainable and ecological practices. What began as localized ad hoc response to crisis has evolved into a highly developed and widespread experiment in urban farming. Today half of the fresh produce consumed by two million Havana residents is grown by “non-traditional urban producers” in abandoned lots and green spaces wedged into the crowded topography of the city.

In 1992 in the city of Holguín, unemployed state workers began a gardening plot as a survival response. The group counted on resources, tools or specialized knowledge. Since fertilizers and chemical inputs were unavailable, by default the growers turned to organic methods: composting, weeding and manual defense against insects. The movement quickly spread. Though individual backyard plots (as well as chickens and an occasional pig) were part of the movement, what really flourished were semi-organized horticulture groups based on shared values: a self-help approach; sharing produce among the members and with vulnerable groups in schools, clinics and seniors centers; and selling excess produce in the neighborhood. In less than a

### The changes in agricultural policy in Cuba offer particular insights to other developing countries.



decade, urban Cuban agriculture arose from abandoned lots to become the largest urban agriculture movement in the Americas.

Recognizing the potential of urban agriculture, in 1994 the government created an urban department of the Ministry of Agriculture. Instead of imposing its authority on this nascent, diverse and admittedly chaotic movement, the Urban Agriculture department wisely has looked to promote, support and "regularize" the practices, for example, by formalizing the growers' claim to community lots and legalizing the growers' right to sell their produce. Through Resolution 527/97 urban dwellers can receive up to one third of an acre for a personal lot in the periphery of the major cities. Through December 1999 more than 190,000 persons had received small lots.

The production from urban agriculture is nothing short of phenomenal. Production levels of vegetables have doubled or tripled every year since 1994. Urban gardens produce about 60% of all the vegetables consumed in Cuba (1998 figures). Without including figures for the small gardens and individual farms, urban agriculture alone provided 215 grams of vegetables per day per person throughout Cuba—more than 70% of the grams recommended by the FAO. The plan for year 2000 calls for urban agriculture to reach 100% of the FAO recommendation.

Though some have disparaged urban agriculture—seen as running counter to modernization and urban progress—in truth, urban agriculture has had an extraordinarily high social impact. The Oxfam-sponsored *organopónico* in Diezmero, San Miguel del Padrón converted a garbage dump into a center for community activity, an experience which has been replicated throughout Cuba as neighbors work side-by-side in the gardens. People have been able to partially resolve one of their most pressing problems through their own efforts. "We don't

have to wait for a paternalistic state to do things for us. We can do it for ourselves," said a retired schoolteacher in the urban garden in Alamar. More than 28,000 retired people, nearly 20,000 women and 20,000 young people, are involved in productive, healthy and remunerative activities.

Clearly, great challenges remain for agriculture in Cuba. With 400,000 employed in the sugar industry and with sugar still the country's leading export, odds favor that the country will stay wedded to sugar production—despite the disheartening prospects over the long term. Many farmers, too, complain about intervention by the state in determining what they will produce and how they will sell. Also, while food is more abundant, consumers have been hit hard by high prices in the market.

Despite the problems still to be faced, Cuba has met the food crisis by moving from statist to private, from large to small, from toxic to green. There are great lessons in this story, for those who think Cuba will never change and for those who believe developing countries can never hope to feed their people. Diversification and urban agriculture are only two of the strategies that

may be applicable to other contexts. For the skeptics of ecological agriculture, I recommend the words of one Cuban farmer who told me, "We hear with our eyes." He wanted to see results before listening to advice on changing techniques. The changes in Cuba and the results that they have produced will allow anyone to "hear with their eyes."

*Minor Sinclair, of Oxfam America, lived in Cuba for four years as an Oxfam representative before joining Oxfam America. This article is adapted from a forthcoming Oxfam report "An End to the Crisis? Food and Farmers in Cuba," by Minor Sinclair and Martha Thompson.*

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## THE SUPERMARKET AS CULTURAL SPACE

Seongmun Nam, a doctoral candidate in Harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Anthropology Department, explored supermarkets and shopping malls in Lima, Peru, with a 1998-1999 DRCLAS summer research grant.

It wasn't exactly a shopping trip. Nam was investigating supermarkets and department stores as social, cultural spaces. Consumption is not simply an economic practice, but one of the most important means in the contemporary world for the cultural construction of self. In the San Miguel commercial district,

Nam examined how the burgeoning supermarket—as well as certain foreign and traditional goods—was used differently by social groups and how these different cultural meanings compete with each other.

"Consumption is a battlefield," he observes "in which various forms of social identity are established, reproduced and arranged."



—JCE



# Global Food Fights

*A Look at the Biotech Revolution*

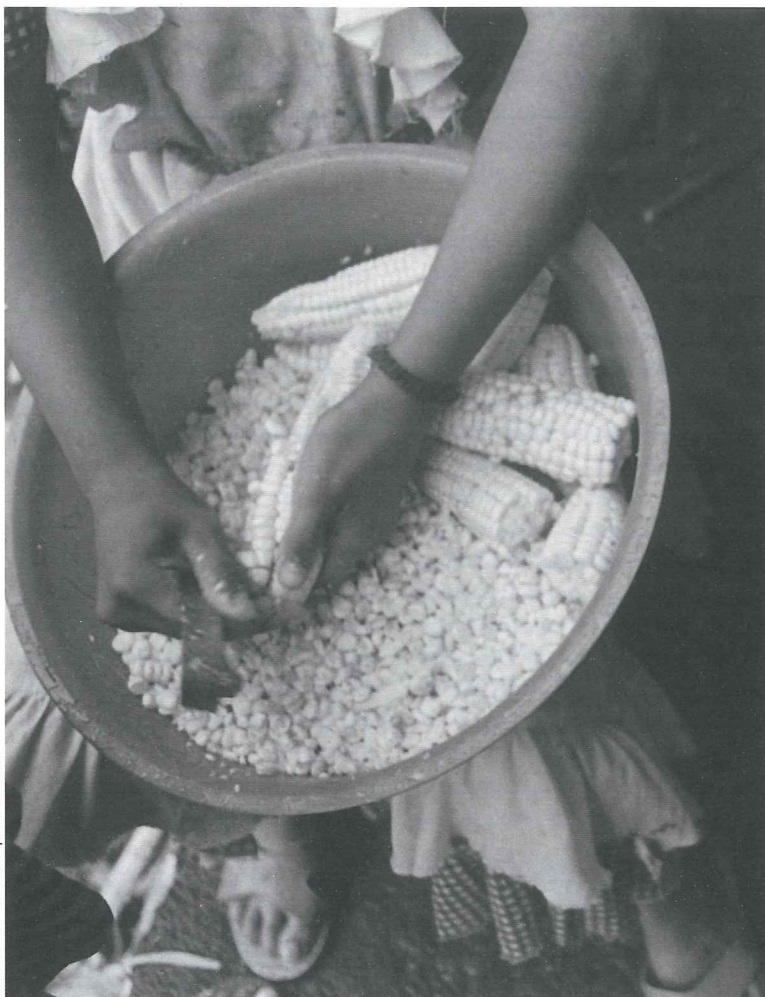
BY ROBERT PAARLBERG

THE INTERNATIONAL DEBATE OVER genetically modified crops pits a cautious, consumer-driven Europe against aggressive U.S. industry. Today's backlash against the commercial use of recombinant DNA technology for food production isn't surprising, given the earlier resistance against automobiles from advocates of horse-drawn buggies. While consumer and environmental groups depict genetically-modified (GM) crops as possibly dangerous to human health and the environment, they offer dangers that are as yet only hypothetical, while they overlook the benefits to regions most in need of these new transgenic crop technologies.

The real stakeholders in this debate are the poor farmers and poorly fed consumers in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. It is they—and not the Europeans—who are confronted daily with difficult farming conditions and rapidly expanding populations. In the tropics, many consumers are not yet well fed and most farmers are not yet wealthy. Larger investments in the genetic modification of some crops could open a new avenue of escape from poverty and malnutrition for millions of citizens of Latin America and other tropical countries. Yet poor farmers in tropical countries are neither participating in nor profiting from the GM crop revolution.

GM crops are a recent phenomenon; large-scale commercial use by U.S. farmers began in 1996. By 1999, roughly half the U.S. soybean crop and one-third of the corn crop were genetically modified. While seed companies made money, U.S. farmers were the big winners, capturing roughly half of the total economic benefit from the new technology. Because chemical sprays could be reduced, spraying costs dropped substantially, by 10-40 per cent.

Surprisingly, however, the GM seed



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The Biotech Revolution: cutting to the kernel?

boom has only been embraced enthusiastically by one Latin American country, Argentina, which has 17 per cent of all land planted with transgenics worldwide. The US and Canada plant 82 per cent of the world total. Mexico has also been growing a small amount of transgenic crops—among nine countries sharing one per cent of the world's total production. The weak participation of tropical countries can be partly explained by the industry's initial focus on temperate-zone crops such as soybeans and corn.

Yet, if properly exploited, the GM crop revolution can have life-changing—and even life-saving—implications in developing countries. Food-

production requirements are increasing rapidly in the tropics due to population growth. Yet agriculture there is lagging because of poor soil; extremes of moisture, heat, and drought; and a plentitude of pests and diseases that attack animals and crops.

Here is where modern transgenic technology carries special promise for the tropics: it can engineer plants and animals with highly specific pest and disease resistance. For instance, transgenic virus-resistant potatoes could help small-scale farmers in Mexico who currently suffer substantial crop damage.

Genetic technology could also improve nutrition by modifying crops to contain more vitamins. The U.N.'s



Food and Agriculture Organization has recently estimated that one of every five citizens of the developing world—828 million people in all—still suffers from chronic undernourishment. One reason for this is lagging agricultural production in some poor regions where farming is a leading source of income for the poor. Low farm productivity means low income and hence vulnerability to hunger. Transgenic crops are potentially easier for the poor to adopt than conventional crops, since all the potential for enhanced productivity is provided through the seeds themselves. Pests and diseases are managed not with chemicals but through genetic engineering.

Critics of the GM revolution fear that the environment might be hurt if engineered crops are released into rural tropical settings where wild relatives of food plants can often be found. If an engineered herbicide-resistant trait breeds into a weedy wild relative, the result might be a hard-to-manage “super-weed.” Or widespread planting of Bt crops might trigger an evolving population of “superbugs” resistant to the toxin. Legitimate biosafety concerns must be addressed through careful testing

and screening on a case-by-case basis. In some countries in Latin America, the means for such testing and monitoring are still largely absent.

Even so, the hypothetical threat to biosafety posed by GM crops remains demonstrably smaller than the actual threat posed by invasions of exotic but non-GM plant and animal species. By some estimates, exotic species movements, unrelated to genetic engineering, currently generate tens of billions of dollars in losses to agriculture in the developing world. If tropical countries are truly concerned with biosafety, GM crops should hardly be their first focus.

GM crops or animal vaccines can actually aid in land conservation and species protection by making farm and grazing lands more productive. Small farmers in the tropics with more productive GM seeds would have less need to plow up or graze more fragile lands in the future. The real threat to biodiversity in poor countries today comes from the cutting of natural habitats such as forests and jungles. Thus, the ultimate environmental payoff from transgenic crop technologies could include fewer watersheds destroyed, fewer hillsides plowed, fewer trees cut, and more

species saved.

With the exception of Argentina, Latin America is not participating in the biotech boom. One reason is that multinational GM seed companies have designed their products with profit in mind—squarely aimed at rich (mostly temperate-zone) countries. Although some critics have warned that developing countries run the risk of becoming dependent on expensive seeds, the danger is that corporate investments will mostly ignore the tropics because of the lack of purchasing power.

Hypothetically, developing countries should not have to create their own GM seeds from scratch. Some GM crop technologies originally developed for the temperate zone might readily be adapted for use in the tropics by transferring the desirable GM traits into locally grown crops through conventional plant breeding. Private companies, however, have little incentive to invest in such local adaptations where farmers are poor. Worse, they may seek to block local adaptations if poor countries are not willing to protect corporate intellectual property rights (IPRs). Seed companies had once hoped to solve piracy problems by

Aerial view of  
Argentina pampa,  
Prov. Cordoba,  
Argentina



OTTO SOLBRIG



engineering a natural sterility gene into the seeds of GM plants. But such thoughts were set aside in 1999 when Monsanto agreed, under intense pressure from critics, not to commercialize this so-called "terminator" technology.

A World Trade Organization agreement known as TRIPS now requires that all members—including even the poorest countries after 2006—provide IPR protection for plant varieties. Yet many developing countries will try to satisfy this requisite without giving up the traditional privileges of farmers to replicate and replant protected seeds on their farms. This being the case, corporations will remain wary of bringing GM technologies into poor countries.

Public sector leadership—such as that provided in the earlier green revolution—cannot be counted on. Investments in science are often risky, and the model of market-led development pushed onto borrowing countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund has taken hold. Also, public development institutions shy away from investment in GM technology out of fear: fear of media criticism, of litigation, or of physical attack by anti-GM activists.

More than just GM research is being left undone. Public-sector support for agricultural development has collapsed across the board. Annual foreign aid to agriculture in poor countries fell by 57 percent between 1988 and 1996 (from \$9.24 billion down to just \$4 billion, measured in constant 1990 dollars), and annual World Bank lending for agricultural and rural development fell by 47 percent between 1986 and 1998 (from \$6 billion to just \$3.2 billion, measured in constant 1996 dollars). As donors have pulled back, governments in the developing world have not filled the gap.

The highly cautious attitude of European consumers and environmental groups has also set an equally cautious tone in Latin America. For instance, in Brazil, farmers who had hoped to plant herbicide-resistant soybeans in 1999 were blocked at the last

minute when a federal judge granted an injunction filed by Greenpeace and a Brazilian consumer institute on grounds of a possible threat to the Brazilian environment. Higher courts

## With the exception of Argentina, Latin America is not participating in the biotech boom.

are now reviewing the case, but a ban on planting remains in place. Brazilian farmers eager to get GM soybean seeds have been smuggling them in from Argentina. However, the state government of Rio Grande do Sul, partly in hopes of being able to offer GM-free products to consumers in Europe and Japan, has threatened to burn their fields and jail any farmers found to be growing GM soybeans. Greenpeace has thrown its weight behind efforts to keep Rio Grande do Sul and all of Brazil a "GM-free zone."

It is naturally easier for regulatory authorities in the developing world, under pressure from GM crop critics, to defend a GM crop approval decision if the crop in question has been developed by national scientists with public sector resources, rather than by a foreign multinational corporation. One reason Brazilians are skeptical toward GM soy beans is that the seeds are sold by a US company, Monsanto. There are several other probable advantages from placing heavier emphasis on public sector research. Public sector GM crop development efforts are less likely to neglect the "orphan crops" grown by many poor farmers in the tropics. Private companies do not see poor farmers as good customers, so the profit-making private sector is unlikely to invest in GM varieties of cassava or black beans; it is the public sector (working with nonprofit private foundations) that must invest the

needed resources here. Developing GM crops through the public sector is also less likely to leave new innovations heavily encumbered with IPR claims.

The private marketplace, by itself, is not likely to work much GM crop magic for the poorest farmers of the developing world. The lead role that so far has been played by private international companies in the GM crop revolution is arguably a leading reason why this revolution has not yet reached the poorest farmers of the developing world, and one reason why GM crops are encountering political and social opposition. During the successful Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, it was not the profit-making private sector that took the lead. Instead, national and international public sector research institutes, philanthropic foundations, agricultural ministries, and extension agencies developed and moved new high-yielding seed varieties to farmers. Too often in the current "gene" revolution the public sector has abdicated this role.

If public sector institutions—especially governments in both the developed and developing world—are willing to invest more financial resources in shaping this new technology, the benefits can more often be targeted toward poor farmers and might also be placed more often in the public domain. Social resistance to the technology will then diminish as well, as publics come to view GM crops more in the context of a national development policy strategy and less as the product of foreign corporate interests.

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# Nutrition, Breastfeeding, and Fertility

*Changing lifestyles and policy implications*

BY CLAUDIA VALEGGIA AND PETER T. ELLISON

The authors wish to thank DRCLAS for its generous support of part of this study and to acknowledge other funding sources: Nestlé Foundation, Wenner-Gren Foundation, and NIH (USA). The authors also give special thanks to the women in Namqom and to the staff of the Health Center, particularly Dr. Rafael Stevens and Dr. Daniel Vicentin, for their friendly support during the study.

"February 22, 1999: It is siesta time in Namqom. Everything is still, timeless, blurry... I am sitting in the nurses' room at the Health Center. I can hear Anastácio, the night guard, snoring. I have decided to write my diary to fight my own drowsiness before our weekly team meeting. After the meeting, I have to go visit Aurelia and her 11-month-old baby. Aurelia is 17 years old and already has a 3 year-old daughter. I know I will be eating "torta frita" and watching "Maria, la del barrio" -the favorite soap opera around here. Part of my job involves visiting breastfeeding mothers at their homes and recording their activities, breastfeeding events, and the baby's behavior. I have to remember to tell Aurelia to come to the Health Center tomorrow to record her weight and other measures. Her son is getting so big! We have to weigh him, too. Ay! The meeting is about to start. I'll continue later" (from the field diary of Norma Fernández, research assistant, Formosa, Argentina).

BREASTFEEDING IS PROBABLY PREVENTING MORE PREGNANCIES worldwide than all the other contraceptive options considered together. Moreover, in many developing countries, breastfeeding is advocated as a contraceptive option (the Lactational Amenorrhea Method-LAM). However, the mechanisms by which breastfeeding affects fertility are still unclear. Many factors seem to be playing a role, among which the nutritional status of the mother could stand as one of the most important. What is the relationship between breastfeeding and fertility?

That a lactating woman was less likely to be menstruating than a non-lactating one was a fact commonly recognized from antiquity to the 18th Century. However, western physicians in the late 19th and early 20th century considered the contraceptive effect of lactation little more than an "old wives' tale." It is now well established that breastfeeding is the most important factor regulating the return to postpartum fertility (i.e., after childbirth). Women who breastfeed resume their menstrual periods later than bottle-feeding women. However, even among breastfeeding mothers, the duration of the postpartum infertility period varies widely. Some women start menstruating two months after delivery, while others can take up to three years to have their first menstrual period. How are these women different? What are the major factors determin-

ing short vs. long periods of postpartum infertility?

There are some marked differences between women with short and long periods of postpartum infertility. Women from developed countries, who breastfeed their babies for a short time, in a structured and scheduled way (a la' Dr. Spock) tend to have short infertility periods. On the other hand, women with long infertility periods tend to live in developing countries where, for economic or cultural reasons, intensive breastfeeding is the norm. Babies in these communities breastfeed very often, even two or three times per hour. Usually, they are put to the breast whenever they cry. One could conclude that the difference in breastfeeding styles is the major factor affecting fertility postpartum. However, another difference has often been overlooked: the nutritional status of the nursing mothers. Women with short infertility periods tend to be well-nourished, while those with long infertility periods tend to be undernourished or under periods of nutritional stress. Thus, it remains unclear how the breastfeeding style may interact with maternal nutrition to affect fertility after birth.

The *metabolic load hypothesis*, as explained below, reconciles the role of breastfeeding and nutritional status on postpartum fertility. Reproduction is energetically expensive. During pregnancy and breastfeeding, the mother has to "metabolize for two." Resuming fertility during the early postpartum period could lead to another pregnancy, which would leave the woman "metabolizing for three." The metabolic load hypothesis proposes that the contraceptive effect of breastfeeding depends on the nutritional status of the mother and the metabolic load that lactation represents for her. For a well-nourished mother, breastfeeding would represent less of a metabolic load than for an undernourished mother. The well-nourished mother has more energy available and, therefore, reaches the

point at which she can "afford" another pregnancy relatively soon. In contrast, poorly nourished mothers can barely afford the cost of breastfeeding one child. Attempting another pregnancy while the cost of lactation is still high would put them and their children at severe risk.

With that theoretical background in mind, we set our sails to the Province of Formosa in Northeastern Argentina. Our goal was to study how nutrition and breastfeeding affect fertility of women after childbirth. The "Breast-

Latin American  
lifestyles are changing  
dramatically with  
processed foods  
replacing home-based  
cultivation.  
Maternal nutrition  
may affect fertility.



feeding and Nutrition Study" is part of our long-term aim to understand the interaction between the environment and human reproduction. Since 1997, our research headquarters have been located in the *barrio* Namqom, a village of 2500 people just outside of Formosa City. The villagers belong to two indigenous groups: the Toba and the Pilagá.

These two ethnic groups, together with the Wichí, were three of the main original groups of inhabitants in the Argentine Chaco region. Until the 1930's the Toba and the Pilagá still relied exclusively on hunting, fishing, and gathering for their subsistence. Like so many other ethnic groups in Latin America, Chacoan aborigines have been suffering from discrimination, poverty, and lack of opportunities in every aspect of their lives. During the last century, disruptions to their traditional lifestyle and ecological deterioration of the habitat forced massive migrations to urban centers. While rural communities still use the forest as a source of food and shelter, families like the ones in Namqom live in poor peri-urban *barrios*. In Namqom, families live on the wages of the few men with public employment, or on the unstable salaries of temporary jobs (*changas*). Most women have no paid jobs and their activities revolve around childcare and household chores.

Women in Namqom breastfeed their infants for two or three years, or until they become pregnant again. This custom made Namqom an ideal site to conduct our studies on nutrition, breastfeeding, and fertility. After an initial village-wide survey, we invited all the breastfeeding, non-menstruating women to participate as subjects in our research. Over 18 months, 120 women went to the health center monthly. During each visit, we recorded the weight, height, and body fat percentage of the mother, as well as the weight, length, and head circumference of the infant. At this time, we asked the participants whether they had started menstruating or not. Twice a month, we visited 70 of these women in their homes and recorded their activities, including a detailed recording of the breastfeeding pattern. We also collected urine samples on a weekly basis to monitor their reproductive status.

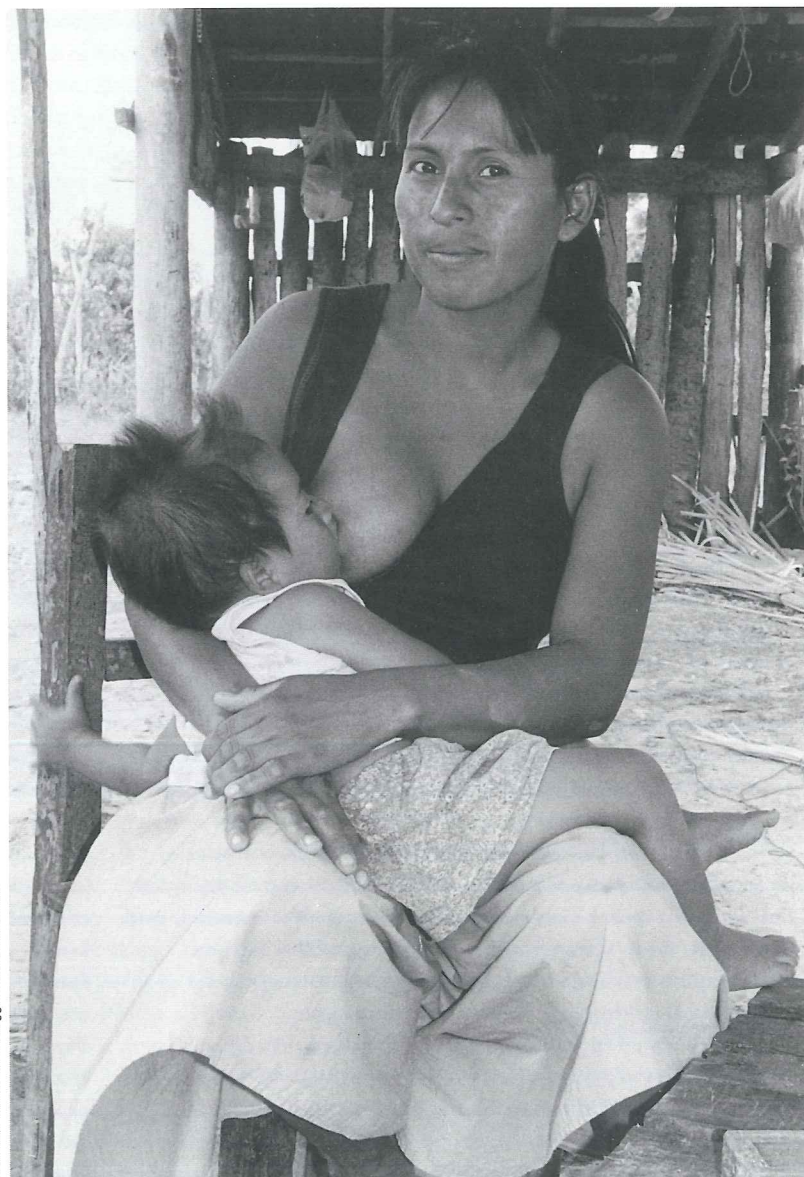
Some clear patterns are emerging from the analysis of our data, most of which support the metabolic load hypothesis. Women in the village breastfeed intensively, putting their babies to the breast, on average, four times per hour (three minutes each time). This intense breastfeeding pattern is comparable to the one observed in other indigenous societies in which women take up to two years to start menstruating again after childbirth. However, women in Namqom resumed menstruation, on average, around the 9th postpartum month. This is a relatively short period of postpartum infertility that we argue can be explained by the nutritional status of most mothers in Namqom. The regular diet in the village is highly caloric, consisting of deep fried dishes,

starches and fat. In addition, most women are sedentary, spending up to 70% of their wake time sitting. As a result of the interaction of high caloric input and low energy output, many women are overweight. This finding suggests that most of our women had plenty of energy available, so that breastfeeding did not represent a high metabolic burden for them. These women could *energetically* afford the risk of another pregnancy and, as a consequence, they resumed menstruating earlier.

In the paragraph above, we stressed the word "energetically," a crucial emphasis. The biological capability of a woman to withstand another *energetically* expensive pregnancy need not mean that she can afford it *socially* or *economically*. From the standpoint of public health policy, this mismatch becomes a serious problem in itself. In many communities in Latin America,

## The response of human fertility to changes in nutrition is of obvious concern.

A Namqom woman breastfeeds her baby.



CLAUDIA VALEGGIA <valeggia@fas.harvard.edu>



lifestyle is changing dramatically. Entire populations who used to rely on foraging or home-based cultivation are now depending on the processed foods available in city markets. Their diets are based on what it is relatively inexpensive: processed sugars, starches, and fat. When these changes occur together with an increased sedentary lifestyle, it becomes obvious how their whole ecology has changed substantially. More importantly, from a health management perspective, their physiology is responding to these changes in ecology and lifestyle.

Our research highlights that these lifestyle shifts inexorably bring changes in biological processes, which in turn will bring new social problems. The response of human fertility to changes in nutrition is of obvious concern. Fertility rates tend to increase in populations experiencing the lifestyle transitions we described. Intervals between births shorten, aggravating infant mortality and taking a toll on maternal health and survival. For example, in 1996, the Pan American Health Organization reported staggering infant and maternal mortality rates for the province of Formosa (31.2 % and 17.2%, respectively). Unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortion rates increase. Age at sexual maturity declines dramatically, increasing the incidence of adolescent motherhood, which in turn affects the social options of young women. More than a third of the mothers participating in our study were between 13 and 19 years old!

If changes in lifestyle can trigger these serious fertility consequences, we need to accompany them with solid public reproductive health programs. For women in poor Latin American communities, the current options in terms of contraception are, at the very best, extremely limited. Surveys performed in poor urban neighborhoods, mostly by local and international NGOs, show a tremendous demand for information and availability of contraceptives. In the course of our study in Namqom, many women approached us with their concerns about their large families and their inability to provide for all of them. We hope our studies will alert decision makers and politicians on the relationship between changes in nutrition, increased fertility, and the lack of sufficient infrastructure to support the demand in contraception. In the next few years, we plan to collaborate with government officials in the organization of family planning programs to help alleviate the lives of women like 17-year-old Aurelia, who does not want a third child.

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## CACHUPA: Cuisine and Community

Isabel Ferreira, known around the Harvard community as the language instructor who teaches Portuguese for Spanish speakers, is used to crossroads. Born in Portugal, she moved to Mozambique when she was three weeks old and spent most of her childhood shuttling from her mother's native Cape Verde and countries in Africa, where her father worked with the colonial administration. Yet the smell of *cachupa*, a corn-based beef boiled dinner, mixes in her memory with the aroma of mangos, big mangos, small mangos, long mangos, a childhood smell independent of any country and linked to a sense of home and a community of women.

While Ferreira played with other children around the mango and banana trees, her mother and other relatives would cook the *cachupa* outdoors in a huge clay pot over an open fire. White and yellow corn similar to hominy would be boiled for hours and hours. The corn—which is not native to the Cape Verde Islands—was prepared in a very special way, pounded and pounded until the edges became roundish and smooth; then beans such as lima beans were added, and then pork, beef, chicken, yams, and vegetables such as turnips, potatoes, and cabbage. There was always a lot of peeling and cutting and talking and singing.

Ferreira loved to watch as the women sang traditional Cape Verdean songs in Creole. When she was six or seven, she began to help cut vegetables, but mostly she watched and listened.

The *cachupa* fed 30 people, cousins going back and forth from one island to another, and it was a weekend event. First the outdoor market, then the preparation, and the eating. Even the eating had different stages. Little children could be fed the clear broth. The meat was often separated out and fried the following day with eggs for breakfast, as different cousins drifted in from distant parts. Whenever someone showed up, it was time to be fed.

"It was quite an enterprise," recalls Ferreira. "*Cachupa* is a national dish; there's *cachupa pobre* and *cachupa rica* (*cachupa* for the poor, and *cachupa* for the rich). Cape Verde is a place of crossing, and I think *cachupa* reflects that."

Ferreira, a doctoral candidate in Portuguese at Brown University, often works with notions of domesticity and family, particularly with the representation of Africa in the 20th century Portuguese novel. She is interested in understanding the concepts of home, house, family, and tropicalism, and it all seems to come together with *cachupa*. She carries on her family's tradition by preparing vegetarian and non-vegetarian versions of *cachupa* as an end-of-semester treat for students—and will soon be bringing the tradition to the University of Notre Dame, where she will become an assistant professor in August.



—JCE



# Culinary Collections

*Recipes and Beyond*

BY JUNE CAROLYN ERLICK

**T**HE SMELLS OF ROAST SUCKLING pig "lechón" and spicy enchiladas waft through the book stacks of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies' Arthur & Elisabeth Schlesinger Library.

That's only figuratively, of course, since the 16,000 volumes in the fields of cooking, gastronomy, and domestic management are set out staidly in print. Although only a relatively small portion of the library's collection is devoted to Latin America, the works range from 19th century Mexican cookbooks to the latest tome on low-calorie Latin@ cooking.

For Latin Americans, there's often the feeling of nostalgia in the culinary collection, with such books as *El libro de Doña Petrona: recetas de arte culinaria*, a Bible of cooking for any young Argentine woman (and more recently, young men). For historians and other scholars, the books hold forth another way of understanding the past, whether through Ignacio Domech's 1917 *El cocinero americano*, a look at New World cooking from the vantage point of Spain, or Elisa Hernández' 1923 *Manual práctico de cocina: para la ciudad y campo*, published in Colombia. The books also reflect the booming Latin@ population in the United States, with more recent books such as *Miami Spice: the New Florida Cuisine*.

Browsing is fun—and one must have the time to browse since the books can't be taken out of the library. There's an 1856 *Manual del cocinero dedicado a las señoritas mexicanas*, a very basic cookbook dedicated to the Mexican Miss. Multiculturalism bloomed in cookbooks long before it became a buzzword, and Violeta Autumns' 1973 *A Russian Jew Cooks in Peru* features recipes for picante de cuy—made with rabbit instead of rodent to keep it kosher—and a Peruvian version of borscht beet soup. And then there was



CRISTINA FRAIRE <cristinafraire@ciudad.com.ar>

*The South American Gentleman's Companion* (1931) in two volumes: exotic drinking and exotic cooking.

*Dinner is Served*, a 1941 book by Luisa Forbes with comical drawings by Brian Fawcett, relates one North American's experience in Mexico, where she traveled as a child: "I shall never forget my disgust at seeing large fat caterpillars roasted on little sticks and eaten with such relish by white-

teethed Kafirs (in South Africa). But my father very wisely reasoned with me as to their merit and cleanliness, and in Mexico I was one of the few foreigners who enjoyed eating the fried maguey caterpillar."

As one explores the shelves, one discovers that cookbooks are about point of view, whether it is that of a gentleman prescribing beginning recipes for young ladies or a Russian

Cooking in  
Argentina

## LATIN AMERICAN COOKBOOKS

The Culinary Collection of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies' Arthur & Elisabeth Schlesinger Library would welcome donations of cookbooks in English, Spanish, or Portuguese, to expand its Latin American collection. The books don't have to be "collector's items" to be useful; quite ordinary cookbooks provide a mirror on daily life.

If you would like to donate cookbooks, please contact Barbara Haber at 617-496-8651.



immigrant trying to figure out how to adapt to her new country, while observing her dietary restrictions.

The Spanish and Latin American collection at the Schlesinger Library expanded greatly with the donation of books from the collection of the late anthropologist Sophie Coe, author of *America's First Cuisines*. Coe, an avid book-collector, died of cancer before she could complete her second book *The True History of Chocolate*, which was completed by her husband, Michael D. Coe, a leading Mesoamerican authority at Yale. Coe's Spanish- and Portuguese-language books include unusual books on cooking with insects and the myths and rituals of bread, as well as the more standard charity cookbooks and manuals for using leftovers.

Barbara Haber, curator of printed materials at the Schlesinger Library, observes that preparing food has been considered "women's work" throughout much of history.

"Even feminists were resistant to looking at food," she said. When the women's-studies movement got off the ground in the 1970s, cooking was often dismissed as an intellectual topic because one of feminism's goals was

## RADCLIFFE CULINARY FRIENDS

The goals of the Radcliffe Culinary Friends are to collect, catalog, and preserve a major collection of books and periodicals related to food; to make known these resources to all interested people; and to provide a forum for discussion about the history of food and the study of food in society. The Radcliffe Culinary Friends publish a newsletter, the Radcliffe Culinary Times, and sponsor special events.

Annual membership categories include Active Culinary Friend (\$35), Student Culinary Friend (\$10), Sustaining Culinary Friend (\$50), Founding Culinary Friend (\$100), Radcliffe Culinary Patron (\$500), and Radcliffe Culinary Benefactor (\$1000). Checks should be made payable to Radcliffe Institute and sent to Radcliffe Culinary Friends, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, 10 Garden Street, Cambridge, MA 02138. For more information, call (617) 495-8647.

to get women out of the kitchen.

Cookbooks are not merely recipe books; they are rich and informative documents that give invaluable information about the art of cooking and about the lives of those using the books. Cooking and eating have emerged as an area of serious scholarly query, observes Haber, who says she seeks "to make culinary history an academically respectable—but not boring—subject."

The Radcliffe collection actually

flourished as a result of the disparaging attitude towards cookbooks. In 1961, Harvard University's Widener Library transferred 1,500 books on domestic science and cookery, dating from 1740 to 1950, to augment the Schlesinger's 19th century American cookbook and historic etiquette book collection. In the 1960s and 70s, Harvard's Lamont Library began to collect popular—mainstream—books. The library decided to give away all the cookbooks it had acquired and a cou-

## SALPICÓN NICARAGÜENSE: A Latin American Culinary Puzzle

Nicaraguan *salpicón* is one of the defining dishes of present-day Nicaraguan cuisine and yet it is unlike anything else that goes by the name of *salpicón*. Rather, it is an entire menu revolving around a large piece of stewed beef. Evidently, the Nicaraguan dish evolved at a time when *salpicón* was more fluid in meaning and then branched out into its own distinctive cultural interpretation. Its roots might trace to late medieval Spain...we discovered a recipe for *salpicón de vaca* in the *Novísimo arte de cocina* published in Mexico City in 1831, but it employs beef and ham together and, in any case, is not like the Nicaraguan dish....

The cut of meat chosen for Nicaraguan *salpicón* varies from household to household depending on finances. The preferred cut is similar to the American eye-of-the-round, the most tender and expensive part of the animal. This cost alone separates it from the gallo pinto (rice and beans) cookery of the average Nicaraguan peasant....

The meat for *salpicón* is placed in a large stewing pan with elaborately chopped vegetables—carrots, onions, copious amounts of garlic, crushed tomatoes, cut up corn on the cob, ripe plantain, yucca, even diced potatoes, chayote or purple

yautia known as *quequisque* in Nicaragua....The meat is then covered with water, sour orange juice, and white-water vinegar and stewed until tender....Once it is cooked, the beef is removed from the stew and shredded. Minced *chiltomas*, lime juice, and onions are then added. The hash is then placed in a serving bowl and sent to the table along with warm rice and hot *sopa de res*. Part of the rice and hashed meat is reserved, moistened with the *sopa de res*, and used as stuffing in *empanadas de maduro*.... Now the *salpicón* meal is complete: *sopa de res* as a starter, white rice, hashed meat, and *empanadas*, a full meal derived from one cut of beef.



Food historian William Woys Weaver and Nicaraguan Enrique Balladares-Castillo wrote a longer version of this article for the Radcliffe Culinary Times (Winter 1999). The authors are interested in finding historical parallels for this menu and invite readers to contact them with comments in English or Spanish <W3Food@aol.com>.



ple of thousand cookbooks ended up at Radcliffe, then an all women's college. With exceptional gifts flowing into the library in the past 30 years—including the collections of Sophie Coe and Julia Child—the library has become one of the largest collection of cookbooks in the United States.

When Haber gave a talk on cookbooks at a Toronto conference several years ago, her colleagues accused her of trying to send women back to the kitchen. Food was a reminder of oppression, and those who advocated that the study of food was important were often relegated to the role of a "running dog of the patriarchy." However, Haber insists, the library collection of cookbooks reflects that women had been a part of public life, even when their voices were silent and only expressed through the preparation of food.

"This too is women's history," she stresses, pointing out that cookbooks are social documents, "prescriptive literature" that showed women how to spend their time.

She is no longer alone. The Radcliffe Culinary Friends, affiliated with the library, also provide a forum for discussion about the history of food and culinary investigation through

## Anthropologist Sophie Coe's collection expanded Latin American holdings.

special public programs and First Mondays, a monthly program for food professionals. In addition, this group of food enthusiasts assists the Library in collecting, cataloguing, and preserving the culinary collection.

Maricel Presilla, a culinary historian and author of *The Foods of Latin America*, tries to get away from her Pan-Latino Hoboken, N.J. restaurant Zafra to attend the Radcliffe events whenever possible. "We are inspired by Haber," says Presilla, who got her doctorate in medieval history before

deciding to go into the food business. "She understands better than anyone about cultura and cocina, about understanding people and societies through food."

Haber, who is currently finishing a book tentatively entitled, *Who Cooked the Last Supper?*, to be published by Simon and Schuster in 2002, says that food history is now as hot as women's history.

"I think that once people realized that women's history is here to stay, people came out of the closet, confessing they love cookbooks," she says. "Food history has become a whole new field of study. It's interdisciplinary and multicultural."

*June Carolyn Erlick is publications director at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies. She received a 2000 Fulbright fellowship to conduct research and teach journalism in Guatemala City, and is currently writing a biography of Guatemalan journalist Irma Flaquer, who disappeared in 1980.*

## THE BEST LITTLE RESTAURANT IN LATIN AMERICA Rana Verde in Callao, Peru

I have only one rule for dining at the Rana Verde: always take a pair of binoculars. That's because the view is so interesting that it needs to be examined, a piece at a time, through every course.

The Rana Verde sits on pilings at the end of a dock in Callao, Peru. It's not for evening dining, but for an *almuerzo peruano*, a lunch that lasts all afternoon. It has a roof, and three sides, but the fourth side is open to the harbor of Callao, Peru's major port. Boat traffic of every type passes nearby—an occasional sailboat, a sculler, a decrepit launch with a put-put engine that gives harbor tours for 10 soles. Farther out, there are sailboats and power boats at their moorings, much like any group of pleasure boats in the States. *Bolicheras*, the fishing boats that are the backbone of Peru's vast fishing industry, and a scattering of old hulks that you would seldom see in a U.S. harbor make interesting viewing for the restaurant goer, not to mention Peruvian Navy warships and enormous freighters entering or leaving the main maritime terminal that handles most of Peru's foreign trade. Anchored on the far horizon, dim shapes of large ships—hulks?—are so far off that even the binoculars fail.

The glare of the sun from the water, the gentle breeze and a *Pisco sour*—that Peruvian gift to world civilization that is something like a daiquiri but really nothing like anything else—com-

bine to make time seem suspended. Gulls and cormorants wheel by. If you're lucky, also making an appearance will be an Inca tern, that most beautiful of sea birds.

As for the cuisine, I must confess to limited familiarity because I always order the same thing. The Rana Verde is a ritual, and for me part of the ritual is *conchitas a la pamesana* followed by *corvina a la chorrillana*. The *conchitas*, giant scallops, are served on the half shell, baked with a covering of Parmesan cheese. The fish of the day will be either *corvina* (sea bass) or *lenguado* (flounder), both excellent whitefish.

A *la chorrillana*, named for the fishing port to the south of Lima, adds onions and tomato to the dish.

You stagger out of the Rana Verde in the late afternoon and feel the need for a walk after three hours of eating and drinking. There around the corner is the *malecón* (board walk) of La Punta, awaiting your stroll. When you get back to Lima the day is shot, but it doesn't matter. Food is ritual.

Shane Hunt is Professor Emeritus of Economics at Boston University and hosts the monthly tertulia of the Pan American Society of New England at DRCLAS. He first visited Peru in 1963, but didn't find the Rana Verde till 1989.





## SALVADORAN PUPUSAS: Part of A National Identity of El Salvador

Any self-respecting Salvadoran town has at least one great pupuseria, where folks line up waiting to buy the hot, pancake-shaped pupusas filled with cheese, chicharrón, or other delicacies.

### Preparing the Dough

There are different brands of tortilla flour to make the dough. MASECA, which can be found in most large supermarkets in the international section, is just one of many. Follow the instructions on the bag and make as much dough as needed. Once the dough has been prepared, set it aside while you prepare the filling.

### Three Fillings

#### CHEESE

3 cups of shredded cheese (use hard and cream cheese mixed together; you can mix frying cheese, mozzarella and ricotta)  
3 or 4 tablespoons of heavy cream  
1/2 to 1 cup of ground "loroco" (this will be hard to find in the U.S. so you can use very finely chopped green peppers or scallions instead)  
Salt to taste

Make a paste with these ingredients. To avoid the paste leaking, it should not be too soft.

#### CHICHARRÓN

1 cup cooked bacon (cooked with garlic, see below)  
4 - 5 tomatoes  
1 green pepper  
Salt to taste

Cook bacon with some garlic (optional). Set fat aside but do not discard. Once cooked, grind bacon with the tomatoes, 1 green pepper, and salt to taste. Mix with some of the bacon fat until it has a soft consistency.

#### MIXTAS

Ground and fried beans (canned or prepared from your favorite recipe)  
When filling the pupusas add beans, chicharrón and cheese (or combine two of the three)

### Making the Pupusas

With two tablespoons of dough make a ball using your hands and later clap your hands until you make a round, thin (1/8 of an inch thick) tortilla. Continue making more tortillas this way. Put some filling over one tortilla, cover with another and push down the sides to close them. This is the "beginners" method.

People who have experience do it this way: make a ball with

the dough. Insert your thumb in the ball and make a hole in the center. Fill that hole with the filling, close the hole by pushing the dough up on the sides. Clap your hands carefully so that the filling doesn't come out and flatten the ball.



Cook on a slightly greased griddle, pan or electric pancake griddle over low-medium heat (325-350° F) first one side, then the other until they are done. Each side will be ready when it no longer sticks to the pan (depending on the thickness of the tortillas, this might take 4 minutes or more per side). Then top with pickled cabbage and tomato sauce.

#### PICKLED CABBAGE

Chopped cabbage, quickly passed through boiling water  
Medium onion, sliced  
Carrot, finely shredded  
Cooked green beans, not too soft (optional)  
Beets (optional)  
Horseradish (optional)  
Red pepper, finely chopped (optional)  
Vinegar  
Water  
1 teaspoon oregano  
Salt to taste

In a glass or plastic jar with a wide opening mix all the ingredients. Add vinegar and water to taste. Mix with a wooden spoon (never metal). Put the mix in the refrigerator and let it rest for a week so that the ingredients pickle.

#### TOMATO SAUCE

Large tomatoes, peeled (quantity will depend on how much sauce you want to prepare)  
1 green pepper  
1 medium onion  
2 garlic cloves  
1 chicken flavored bouillon cube  
Cilantro (optional)  
Water  
Salt to taste

Cook all the ingredients with a little water. Put everything in a blender and blend. Cook for another 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

DRCLAS Graduate Student Associate Graciela Fortín-Magana from El Salvador contributed this pupusa recipe. Her mother sent her the recipe for the traditional Salvadoran dish by e-mail: a combination of a cookbook recipe and one for beginning cooks she found on the Internet. Fortín-Magana is a doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and is working on an urban anthropological study of developer-built, low-income housing settlements in San Salvador.



# In Search of Mexico's National Cuisine

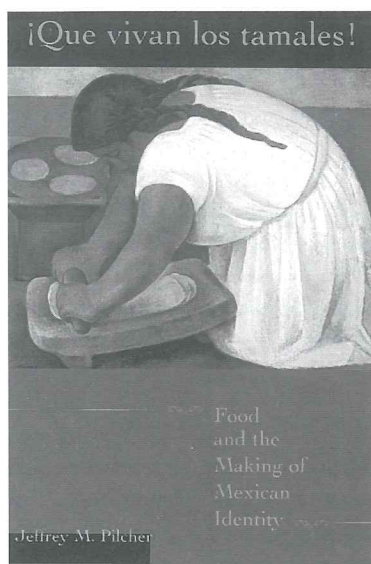
*¡Que vivan los tamales (y tortillas)!*

BY JEFFREY M. PILCHER

GROWING UP IN THE MIDWEST IN the 1970s, I ate a bland diet of meat and potatoes and soothing Jell-O salads. Mexican food remained unknown territory until my brother moved to Las Cruces, New Mexico, and married a Mexican-American woman. At the wedding rehearsal dinner, his future mother-in-law prepared *gorditas*, fat corn tortillas reminiscent of pita bread. Never having encountered such a thing before, I observed another of the groomsman add a heaping spoonful of salsa and begin to devour the *gordita* with obvious relish. He was an Anglo, so I assumed it must be safe and followed his example, not realizing that as a Texan, he was accustomed to eating the devil's own spice. I took a bite and suddenly felt steam come boiling out my ears. My subsequent dance around the house, culminating with my head stuck futilely under the kitchen faucet, has become a family legend. This initiation into Mexican food proved to be one of the turning points of my life; indeed, my professional career may be an attempt to cope with the trauma.

After finishing a bachelor's degree at the University of Illinois, I followed my brother to the Southwest. I began work on an M.A. in history at New Mexico State University while learning to cook Mexican food from my sister-in-law's mother. She never learned to speak English and my Spanish was quite rudimentary at the time, so the lessons were conducted the old fashioned way, by touch, smell, and taste. I mixed the dough for tamales by hand to learn the proper texture, and to describe the type of pork to use for the filling, she gave me a slap on the flank.

Following this apprenticeship in Mexican history and cooking, I went to Texas Christian University for my Ph.D. But even while studying under William Beezley, the dean of Mexican cultural history, the idea of combining the two interests to write a dissertation on Mexican cuisine seemed unimaginable at first. Nevertheless, as I prepared for the comprehensive exams, I also read the works of Mary Douglas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jack Goody, Sidney Mintz, and Arjun Appadurai. Encouraged by their examples, I made research trips to the Benson Library of the University of Texas. What I found in nineteenth-century Mexican cook-



books bore little resemblance to the tamales and gorditas I had so recently learned to prepare. Those volumes ignored popular street foods, based on the pre-Hispanic grain, maize, and instead gave recipes for elite Spanish and French dishes. I had stumbled on the culinary expression of Mexico's national identity crisis: a *mestizo* or mixed-race people who inherited the European disdain for their Native American ancestors.

My dissertation research in Mexico proved even more surprising. After my shocking initial encounter with chiles, I was amazed to discover that Mexicans do not even eat chiles for the heat, unlike some Texans who indulge in masochistic jalapeño popping contests.

Instead, they blend the tastes of different chiles to form complex sauces called *moles*. Regular chile eaters (myself now included) develop a tolerance to the capsaic acids in the chiles, and so they need to eat hotter peppers to get the same effect, which is why Mexican foods taste so fiery to newcomers. Even familiar foods seemed strange in Mexico; gelatin was ubiquitous in chile-flavored aspics and tropical fruit desserts, but little marshmallows were nowhere to be found.

Another surprise came from the regional diversity of Mexican cuisine, a legacy of both the pre-Hispanic civilizations and the Spanish colonization. The indigenous foods of the Maya in the Yucatan and of the Zapoteca and the Mixteca of nearby Oaxaca, for example, are quite distinct notwithstanding similarities such as the use of banana leaves to wrap tamales instead of the corn husks more frequent farther north. The Yucatecan use of *habanero* chiles and *achiote* paste produces a completely different taste from the *chile pasilla* and *hoja santa* used to prepare Oaxacan moles. The central highlands around Mexico City are the center of the greatest culinary *mestizaje*, a process exemplified by *mole poblano*, a turkey cooked in a deep brown sauce that contains a complex mixture of Old World spices and nuts with New World chiles and chocolate. The quintessential dish of the Pacific Coast region, including Guadalajara, is likewise a *mestizo* stew, *pozole*, of hominy and pork. On the Gulf Coast, by contrast, seafood is often cooked in a Mediterranean style, for example, snapper Ver-

Nutritional science  
and food culture  
in Latin American  
countries reveal  
attitudes towards  
history, class, and  
the evolution of  
national identity.



acruz. The foods seen most often in the United States tend to come from the north, a region of Spanish settlement where wheat and beef were the preferred foods. This tremendous variation of region, class, and ethnicity impeded the development of a common national cuisine and of Mexican nationalism in general.

Cookbooks also offered a window on the elusive realm of domesticity in nineteenth-century Mexico. Interpreting them proved problematic, however, for most were written by male intellectuals as instructional literature for women. The few available manuscripts of family cookbooks allowed some insights on the intersection between oral and written culture. Indeed, domestic writing was one of the first socially acceptable forms of literary production for women at the time. Comparing the manuscripts with published volumes, I could see the process by which women read the latter works, adapting them to the kitchen by selecting practical recipes, deleting extraneous ingredients, and fixing occasional problems. These home cooks certainly ignored such absurd concoctions as *frijoles rellenos*, in which each bean was individually stuffed with cheese, dipped in egg batter, and fried. I could only gain a glimpse into this domestic world because of the limited number of volumes available when I did my fieldwork, but in less than a decade, a cottage industry has grown up publishing man-

uscript family cookbooks, so the next researcher will achieve far more than my stumbling efforts.

I also studied the history of Mexican nutritional science, which emerged as an important part of the national discourse at the turn of the last century. When large-scale industrialization began during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1875-1911), the vast majority of the rural population contributed little to the market economy. The ruling *científicos* (scientific party) sought to explain this low productivity, but the racial theories of Anglo-American Social Darwinism had little appeal because both the elite and the masses were predominantly mestizo. Instead, they resorted to the newly developed science of nutri-

tion and claimed that the Native American staple, maize, was inferior to the European grain, wheat, and that progress would be impossible until the masses were weaned from the former and taught to eat the latter.

Nutritionally, this argument was spurious, as the Mexican National Institute of Nutrition demonstrated in the 1930s with the assistance of grants and researchers from the Rockefeller Foundation. Nevertheless, the *científico* elite correctly perceived that the hardy Native American grain was the foundation of the subsistence rural economy, and that the adoption of the fragile and expensive European grain would draw the villages into the market economy. The Porfirian goal was finally achieved not

Fortunately, the stigma  
that food history is  
not a serious subject  
is being rejected by a  
growing number of  
excellent scholars.

A Namqom woman  
prepares a fire:  
"the elusive realm  
of domesticity."



CLAUDIA VALEGGIA <cvaleggia@fas.harvard.edu>



by replacing maize but rather by making it a commodity through mechanical corn mills, automatic tortilla machines, and dehydrated tortilla flour. In retrospect, the goal of this "tortilla discourse" was to divert attention from agrarian reform, which would have provided Mexican campesinos with the land to raise the foods, especially beans, needed to obtain a balanced diet.

Once the threat of revolutionary reform had abated, about 1940, the urban middle class finally embraced the lower-class maize dishes as the basis for a national cuisine. The spread of processed foods to the countryside sent folklorists rushing to preserve the previously scorned vernacular cuisine. The most prolific of these culinary researchers, Josefina Velázquez de León, published more than a hundred and fifty cookbooks, including a volume of regional recipes that became the model for future cookbooks seeking to represent the Mexican national cuisine. Mexico City restaurants also became a site for the cosmopolitan elite to experiment with diverse provincial dishes, especially since modern transportation made local ingredients available while massive rural-urban migration brought cooks from all over the country.

Nevertheless, the incorporation of indigenous foods came only hesitantly, as can be seen in the case of *cuitlacoche*. This maize fungus (*Ustilago maydis*), the blight of Midwestern farmers in the United States, was a popular delicacy among the formerly corn-worshipping Nahuas, who referred to the black spores as "excrement of the gods" and ate them in rustic corn fritters called *quesadillas*. *Cuitlacoche* became acceptable on elite tables only in the 1940s, when gourmet Jaime Saldívar devised a suitably refined preparation, in *crêpes* with *béchamel* sauce, thereby using French haute cuisine to ritually cleanse the native dish. By the 1990s, the fungus had become known as the "Mexican truffle" and it formed the mainstay of the so-called "nueva cocina mexicana" as chefs began preparing it in ravioli, soups, and endless mousses. For an elite that had dined for so long on continental cuisine, indigenous dishes ironically became the only claim to a distinctive national cuisine.

Ultimately, my volume on maize and wheat and Mexican national identity is merely an interpretative synthesis, and perhaps a premature one at that, for a tremendous amount of research remains to be done. Fortunately, the stigma that food history is not a serious subject is being rejected by a growing number of excellent scholars, most notably Virginia García Acosta, Martín González de la Vara, José Luis Juárez, Janet Long, Rosalva Loreto López, and John Super. Moreover, sources have become ever more available through the appearance of family cookbooks as well as the magnificent series of ethnic cookbooks being published by Conaculta.

Research topics abound for aspiring graduate students with an interest in Mexican cuisine. When I wrote my second book, a biography of the Mexican film comedian Cantinflas, I was struck by the significance of popular foods such as tequila and *chicharrones* (pork cracklings) in his humorous discourse. Currently I am studying the mod-

ernization of the Mexico City meat supply during the nineteenth century, and other food industries, particularly beer, call out to economic historians. Ethnohistorians with indigenous language skills are sure to refine our understanding of the role of food in the ongoing encounter between Spaniards and Native Americans. Intriguing works of gender studies could be written about the significance of women and gays in the Mexican restaurant business. But for anyone setting off in search of culinary history in Mexico's archives and libraries, just remember to bring a snack to keep you going until lunchtime.

*Jeffrey M. Pilcher is Associate Professor of History at The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina, and he has lectured at the Culinary Institute of America in St. Helena, California. His first book, ¡Que vivan los tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity (1998), won the Thomas F. McGann Memorial Prize. He is also the author of Cantinflas and the Chaos of Mexican Modernity (2001).*

## PEANUTS, POPCORN, CRACKER JACKS The Latin American Origins of U.S. Commercial Snack Food

While peanuts and popcorn were new to 19th century United States, both had been consumed as snacks in the Americas for thousands of years. Peanuts originated in Bolivia, domesticated by indigenous people. They spread west to Peru, east to Brazil, north to Central America, where the Spanish Conquistadores encountered them after 1519. The Portuguese found them in Brazil and introduced them to Africa. As the slave trade expanded from Africa, peanuts were introduced into the Caribbean as a slave food and then migrated to southern British colonies in North America during the mid-18th century. Before the 19th century, peanut oil was manufactured in Europe and America, mainly for lubricating and lighting, since it was considered inferior to lard and olive oil for cooking. Peanuts were fodder for livestock. Native Americans and poor whites ate peanuts, and southern farmers exported them to northern cities, where roasted peanuts became the United States' first snack food.

Popcorn, a variety of maize domesticated in southern Mexico and northern Guatemala, has a hard outer hull or endosperm. When the kernels are heated, moisture inside converts to steam, and pressure builds up until the hull explodes. Though popcorn varieties were grown throughout the pre-Columbian Americas, they were not being cultivated in what is now the United States before the Europeans arrived. U.S. sailors probably took some popcorn from Chile around 1800. Whatever the origin, popcorn spread quickly through the eastern states, the south, and the midwest. With the invention of the corn popper around 1837, popcorn became the United States' first food fad. Wagon loads of popcorn balls were sold in Boston by the late 1840s.

Andrew Smith, author of *Popped Culture: A Social History of Popcorn in America*, wrote about the Latin American origins of snack food in the *Radcliffe Culinary Times* (Spring 2000).

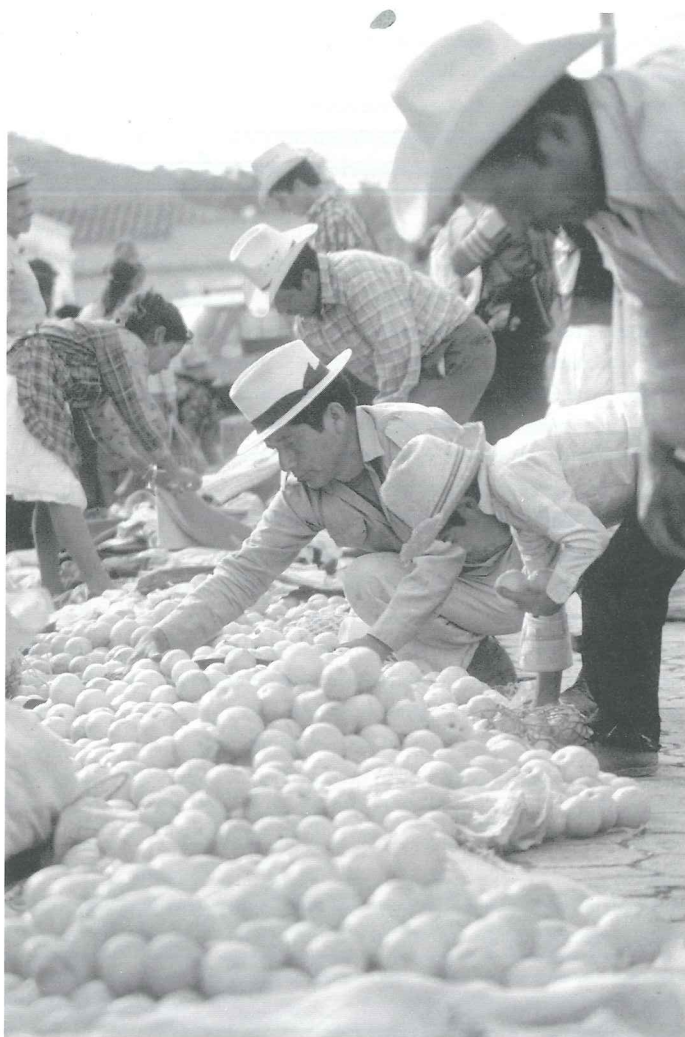
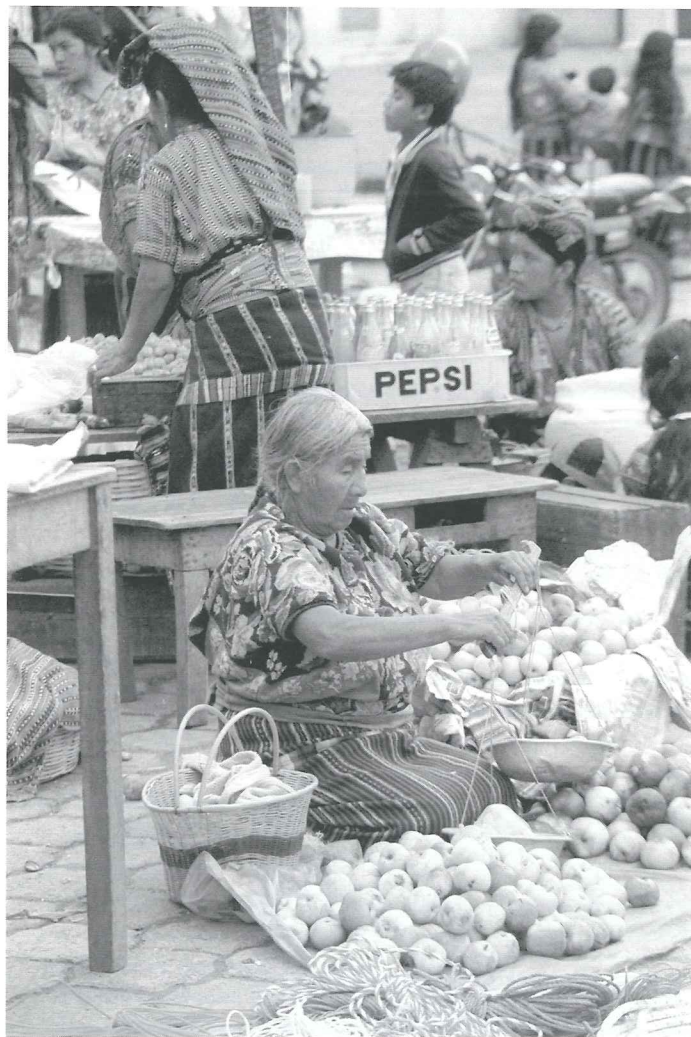




# Food in the Americas

*From Guatemalan Markets to Brazilian Goat Cheese*

PHOTOESSAY BY JUSTIN IDE



"People give food meaning. It's easy to trivialize, because food is everywhere. But love of food is love of life."

—Barbara Haber, curator of printed books  
Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study

clockwise from top left: A Guatemalan market: A woman in traditional dress sells her produce; Guatemalan men carefully sort through the produce; a closeup of traditional fruits and vegetables, sold in small bags for munching with lemon, chile, and salt.

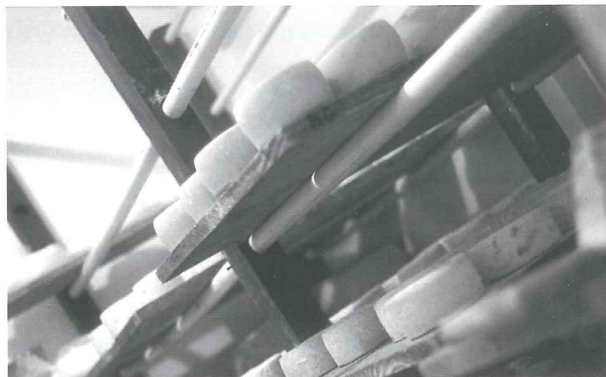
Justin Ide is staff photographer at Harvard University's Office of News and Public Affairs. He has traveled extensively in Latin America and can be reached at <justin\_ide@harvard.edu>.





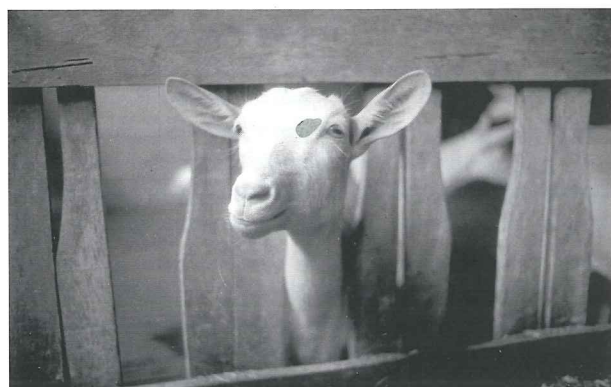
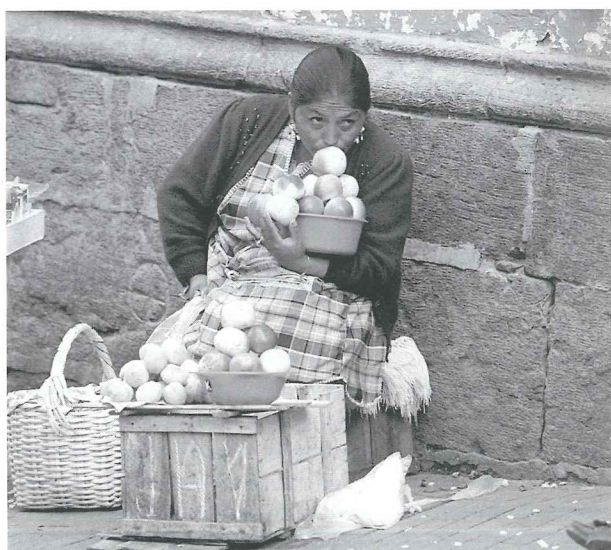


clockwise from left: A young boy fishes for supper in Ecuador; Fazenda Geneve, a goat farm in Nova Friburgo, Brazil, where they make all the cheese for French restaurants in Brazil: goat cheese aging on racks; these goats will someday provide milk for cheese at the "Cremerie," a great restaurant outside of Teresopolis, two hours from Rio; a woman sells apples on the streets of Ecuador



"Famine and undernourishment are not due to lack of food availability. Rather they result from the inability of people to grow their own food or to purchase it from those that grow it."

—Otto T. Solbrig, Harvard Biology Department





# The Maya Hand Down a Recipe for Chocolate

*From Cacao to Tiste*

BY SUSIE SEEFELT LESIEUTRE

Cacao pot found by Harvard archeologists in 1895 at Copán, Honduras

INSIDE THE HARVARD PEABODY Museum Annex, rows and rows of metal shelving reveal hundreds of clay pots and shards, all catalogued with numbers on their sides. Most of these are decorative, with red and black glaze, and intricate designs. One plain pot—easily overlooked—has just a remnant of color. This is pot C597, barrel-shaped, measuring about 20 cm high with its lid. Only the pod-like appendages, at the top of the base and on the lid, hint at its loftier purpose.

Called a ‘cacao pot’ or a ‘lidded incensario’ by museum staff, this particular pot was found by Harvard archeologists in 1895 at the Maya site in Copán, Honduras, at the base of a stone monument to the 15th ruler in the Copán dynasty. Barbara Fash, professor in Harvard’s department of Anthropology, places this pot around 700 BC. The appendages represent cacao pods she says, which indicate the pot held cacao, in some form. The fact that this pot was taken from a sacred, revered site indicates that it, and whatever was inside, was used in ritual.

Anthropologist Sophie Coe, writing in her book *America’s First Cuisines*, distinguishes between cacao—“the tree and its products before processing,” cocoa—“the product after processing had begun,” and chocolate—the term we all use now, what Europeans called the drink when they brought it back from the Americas.

The Maya living along the Pacific Coast of Mesoamerica—perhaps as early as 3000 BC—first domesticated the cacao trees, cultivating the wild varieties easily in the humid climate. “It’s an interesting tree,” says Fash, “because it’s of a variety that doesn’t grow in our climate, so it’s odd to

see it at first. Sometimes they [the pods] hang off branches, but other times right off the trunk of the tree.”

She describes the pods as being palm-sized and yellow or reddish in color. When you open it, Fash continues, “there’s a white, fleshy, sort of bed for the seeds in the pod.” Cocoa is produced from the seeds, or beans, as they are sometimes called.

In *Cuisines*, Coe supplies the following guidelines to preparing the seeds, adding this caveat: “It is no easy thing to transform the beans, wrapped in their white flesh inside the pod, into something that tastes and smells like chocolate. The first step is to gather the ripe pods and allow them to ferment for a few days.... After this, the seeds are removed...and allowed to dry; then they are carefully toasted and peeled. The peeled nut is ground, and reground, and reground again... preferably heated by a small fire or a pan of hot coals under it.” The powder is made into a drink then, or “formed into small storable cakes.” The drink was beaten, “to raise the foam, which was considered the best part of the drink and the sign of quality.”

Quality was a necessary attribute. “Used as a ritual drink,” says Fash,

“the Maya were feeding their most precious substance to the gods.” It had to be good. This food also provided nourishment for the elite, who drank cocoa during ceremonies. To the basic powder derived from the seeds, other ingredients were added—mainly chile and cinnamon.

The cacao pots, such as the one found in the base of the monument in Copán, would have been made for such ceremonies. “They were produced quickly, for a special occasion,” says Fash. “Lots of these pots have been found, in similar settings.” In one case, Fash notes, Hershey Foods Corporation was called upon to test the residue of several pots, which showed that they had contained some liquid form of cacao. Other pots were



COURTESY: PRESIDENT & FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE PEABODY MUSEUM, HARVARD UNIVERSITY



Maya Hieroglyph meaning *ka-ka-wa*, Maya word for cacao credit: David Stuart in “The Rio Azul cacao pot: epigraphic observations on the function of a Maya ceramic vessel” *Antiquity*, 62 (1988): 153-7



decorated with a hieroglyph which researchers believe represents the Maya word for 'cacao'—*ka-ka-wa*—indicating that they, too, played a role in the ritual use of cacao.

Fash believes that cacao took on its grand significance by the very process of domestication. "If you're part of the process...of domestication, it's time consuming and labor intensive, a religious commitment almost, because, like growing anything, you have to invest a lot of yourself into making it work."

From this enormous effort, she says, a "culture of religion" grew, and like maize, the cacao seed became a sacred entity.

Fash says that today, descendants

of the early Maya still offer cacao to the gods, leaving their gifts in caves. Mostly however, chocolate has become a common item, but retains much of its earlier flavor. Fash describes *tiste*—a chocolate drink she has had in Copán, Honduras, where Harvard's cacao pot was crafted many centuries before. This is a powdered mixture of toasted cacao, toasted maize, sugar, cinnamon and *achiote*—which provides a red color. This mixture is ground into a powder and then added to milk or water.

*Mole*, a Mexican chocolate sauce served over chicken, also contains chile and cinnamon, the ancient mainstays. "It's so unlike the way we're accustomed to being prepared, as far as

chocolate goes," Fash comments, listing the sweets we associate with a particular chocolate taste: chocolate cake, chocolate frosting, hot chocolate. "They almost always add something to it, which gives it a very different kind of flavor experience. You're almost not sure you feel right afterwards!"

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## THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF OAXACAN CHOCOLATE The Effect on Gender Roles

I spent the fall semester of my junior year at Harvard in Mexico. While I'd heard a lot about coffee in Chiapas, I never imagined that what would really capture my attention was chocolate in Oaxaca. For my senior thesis, I now plan to investigate the process of commercialization and future globalization on the chocolate market in Oaxaca, Mexico, and how this affects Oaxacan women.

Cacao processing and chocolate consumption have a long history in this region and they are a daily part of life in Oaxaca. Since the 1950s three local companies have produced and marketed chocolate locally as well as in Mexico City. These companies are currently in the process of marketing new products to sell to the global marketplace. Although the use of electronic grinders is now common, ingredients are still added by hand, mixed by hand, packaged by hand and personally given to the customer. Studying the recent commercialization of chocolate in Oaxaca provides an important analysis of local-level responses to large-scale economic movement and pressure.

Little research has been done on the different issues surrounding the production, commercialization, and culture of cacao. Cacao has traditionally, and up until fairly recently, been processed and prepared on a small scale in the home by women. Since local demand was being met for such a long time by individual households and then local small-scale manufacturing, chocolate is one of the last indigenous foods to have become industrialized in the local economy.

There is substantial scholarship on food systems and food industrialization in "developing" nations on which to base my research. There are theoretical tools I will use to analyze food and culture in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and economics. Specifically, previous studies on indigenous foods have concluded that new forms of production and commercial-

ization lead to the inevitable erosion of female control over household economies and a decrease in the item's local symbolic importance. Is this the case in Oaxaca? Do women now have more time to do other activities than buying the individual products daily (cinnamon, sugar, almonds, and cacao seeds) and taking the ingredients to be processed? Do women feel that they are losing power over this important role of the economy? What influence have women had in the commercialization of cacao? How have the private and public spheres of consumption changed? Are more women working outside the home, making packaged hot chocolate a desirable product even within Oaxaca?

I plan to interview women who sell chocolate, the women, and perhaps men, who buy chocolate, interviewing from different generations. I will also interview the largest Oaxacan companies to understand their current and future plans, as well as the problems they have faced in entering an international market: Chocolates Mayordomo, Chocolates Guelagueta, and Chocolates La Soledad. The existing companies are not based on farmer cooperatives, but rather on family and small business models. Are they supported by international investment or funding? Can the experience of Oaxacan chocolate companies teach us something about the way local companies can incorporate culture and artistry with efficiency on a large scale?

As a Social Studies concentrator, pursuing a certificate in Latin American Studies, I spent this past fall semester living, studying, and speaking Spanish in Mexico City and traveling throughout Mexico, including Oaxaca and Chiapas. I feel comfortable in Mexico and most importantly...I fell in love with Oaxacan chocolate.



—Elena C. Chavez



A Mayan girl in  
traditional dress  
amidst Guatemalan  
corn.



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## Rigoberta Menchú and the Politics of Food

*"We only trust people who eat what we eat..."*

BY NINA M. SCOTT

I THINK EVERYONE WHO READS RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ'S famous 1982 *testimonio* remembers the part in editor Elisabeth Burgos' prologue when she describes how she won the Guatemalan woman's trust by preparing food together. From Venezuela Burgos had received corn flour and black beans, and had preserved some cayenne peppers in oil. Corn, chile and beans were also the staples of Guatemalan cuisine, and the young Rigoberta, far from home in Paris, was elated to partake of some "soul food:" "I cannot describe how happy that [food] made Rigoberta. It made me happy, too, as the smell of *tortillas* and refried beans brought back my childhood in Venezuela, where the women get up early to cook *arepas* for breakfast.... 'We only trust people who eat what we eat,' she told me one day ...[and] I suddenly realized that she had begun to trust me. A relationship based on food proves

that there are areas where Indians and non-Indians can meet and share things: the *tortillas* and black beans had brought us together ...."

The food exchange between these two women is interesting in several ways. It serves as a "marker of ethnic identity via ethnic cuisine," as anthropologist Ellen Messer terms these interactions in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* 1984, yet there are also profound differences in how this food functions for each woman. In the narration, there is a clear difference of class. From her earliest childhood, Rigoberta rose early each morning to grind corn and make *tortillas*; Burgos speaks of *other* women getting up to make *arepas* when she was a child. In retrospect, I am surprised that Burgos—an ethnologist and experienced leftist activist who had traveled widely in Latin America—told this story so ingenuously. In *A Dream of Light and Shadow*, critic



Mary Jane Treacy interpreted this episode quite differently. She classified Rigoberta as a “skilled organizer ... and a savvy politician who uses foreign intellectuals and presses to help [her] cause. So although her interlocutor and editor Elizabeth Burgos could fall into reveries of a Venezuelan childhood as she watched Rigoberta make tortillas in her Paris home, we can bet that Rigoberta knew exactly why she was in France telling her life story to a woman with excellent international connections.” From the prologue on, then, food and politics is a dominant theme in Menchú’s *testimonio*, and food discourse is a productive frame for analyzing this text.

Before proceeding any further, however, it is important to note that *testimonio* itself is a very slippery genre. Menchú told her story to Burgos, who typed, transcribed and edited it, so that we are always reading a mediated text. The matter becomes even more complicated with recent revelations that Rigoberta herself may not have lived all of the experiences she relates in her *testimonio*. The impact this may have on the reader is something I will return to later.

Burgos is not the only one who is seduced by sharing food with Rigoberta: most readers are as well, as food functions on so many levels in our lives and experiences. Whenever I introduce the subject of food into my classroom lectures, students’ eyes come into focus, slouchers sit up and there is instant attention. Food as a trigger of affective memory is well-known, as is its role as definer of cultural identity. Rigoberta’s food discourse functions on both fronts, which is what makes it both memorable and effective.

Once the prologue is over and Menchú takes over the narration, the reader immediately becomes aware of the central importance of food in her people’s lives, mainly because of its constant scarcity. Rituals of food are both elaborate and rigidly prescribed. As culinary historian Margaret Visser noted in *The Rituals of Dinner*, each culture chooses food preparation and consumption to reflect “the most appropriate to handle the mightiest of necessities, the most potent of symbols, the medium through which we repeatedly express our relationships to each other.” Rigoberta describes rituals of food preparation very fully: women blow on their hands prior to making the basic corn/lime mixture, the *nixtamal*; they whip clay pots to make them resistant; grinding stones [*metates*] are given with them in marriage; water and wood are blessed. The process of grinding corn for tortillas was an especially arduous and time-consuming chore. Menchú saw this in the life of her own mother. When the family went to harvest coffee to supplement their income, Rigoberta’s mother also took on cooking for about forty workers; to do this she got up at three in the morning to grind the corn, and worked until seven at night, while also providing for her own children

and picking coffee. Observing her mother’s backbreaking work schedule awakened the child Rigoberta to the conditions in which her people lived: “Watching her made me feel useless and weak because I couldn’t do anything to help her except look after my brother. That’s when my consciousness was born.” (34)

Rigoberta is adamant about using only natural products, and in preparing food in traditional ways. She urged her people to avoid machine-produced *ladino* (non-Indian) foods, such as cheese, ham and Coca-Cola, because “The *ladinos* bring their machines in little by little and very soon they own everything.” (72) Rigoberta’s instincts are well-founded: studies show that the mechanization of corn tortilla production in Mexico and the consumer shift to flour tortillas and bread have certainly had deep social repercussions.

Making bread is far less labor-intensive than making tortillas, but Rigoberta was averse to bread. She objected to it neither because of its taste, nor because of the cultural corn/wheat opposition in Mesoamerica, but because the whites mixed wheat with eggs. Bread to her is a metaphor for a contaminated mestizo culture: “It was a mixture, no longer what our ancestors ate. It was White Man’s food, and white men are like their bread, they are not wholesome. The blood of our most noble ancestors was mixed with the blood of white

men. They are a mixture, just like their food.” (71)

Besides Rigoberta’s experiences on the coffee plantation, her stint in the city, working as a domestic servant for a *ladino* family, was another formative experience in shaping her conscience. She cited her lack of Spanish as a prime factor in making communication with her employers difficult, but she had no trouble deciphering extraverbal signs which indicated her place in their culture. Nowhere did she feel this more keenly than in the family’s rituals of eating: “When I saw the maid bring out the dog’s food—bits of meat, rice, things that the family ate—and they gave me a few beans and hard *tortillas*, that hurt me very much. The dog had a good meal and I didn’t deserve as good a meal as the dog” (92).

At Christmastime, she and her señora had stayed up an entire night making two hundred tamales for a family party, but in this instance shared food preparation did not bring the women closer. Near the end of the party the señora had given Rigoberta one tamal, but when some late arrivals showed up, the señora took it back to feed her friends. For Rigoberta, this was the last straw.

After this episode Rigoberta became much more politically aware. Another negative food experience with *ladinos* heightened her rage at her people’s powerlessness in the social and political processes of Guatemala. The peasants had by now organized to protect their lands against the claims of the landholders, but needed the help of *ladino*

“Neither the  
government nor  
imperialism can say:  
‘Don’t be hungry,’  
when we are all dying  
of hunger.”  
—Rigoberta Menchú



A family in Chichicastenango: "I discovered that all Indians have a common culture in spite of the linguistic barriers, ethnic barriers and different modes of dress. The basis of our culture is maize."  
—Rigoberta Menchú



JOYCE PENFIELD

lawyers and engineers: "[The engineers] were *ladinos*. They couldn't eat our food, our *tortillas* with salt. If we didn't feed them well they would probably favor the landowners. So we treated them very well, out of fear. We gave them our best, our fattest animals .... Our community, which never bought so much as a bottle of oil, had to buy them rice, oil, eggs, chickens, meat. We had to buy coffee and sugar, because they couldn't eat *panela*. Our community never ate these things." (104) She has set up a dichotomy between certain foods that is clearly political as well as ethnic: bread vs. *tortilla*; coffee vs. water or maize drinks (*pinol*, *atol*); refined sugar vs. *panela*. Similarly, when General Kjell Laugerud began his electoral campaign in 1974 he promised the peasants land and bread in return for their vote. Rigoberta was indignant: "Kjell talked a lot about giving us bread and sharing out the land. They have to say bread, they can't even say *tortilla*. Most of them don't [even] know what Indians eat." (157). When war broke out and the indigenous population armed itself against government soldiers, women even used food as weapons: boiling water, lime, chili, and salt, which they would throw into the soldiers' eyes.

Critics have commented on the way Rigoberta availed herself of the Bible when it suited her needs, adopting that which was useful to her cause. Her definition of Heaven is very simple: "... the kingdom of God on earth ... will exist only when we all have enough to eat, when our children, brothers, parents don't have to die from hunger and malnutrition. That will be the 'Glory', a Kingdom for [us] who have never known it." (134) She couched her fight against the Guatemalan government and imperialism in the same terms: "... it is a struggle which cannot be stopped. Neither the governments nor imperialism can stop it because it is a struggle of hunger and poverty. Neither the government nor imperialism can say: 'Don't be hungry,' when we are all dying of hunger." (135)

Some of the most tragic parts of her *testimonio* concern the violent deaths of her father and mother, both at the hands of the Guatemalan government. Rigoberta wrote

eulogies about them both. She recalled her mother's many political discussions while helping other women make *tortillas*, but wrote a longer statement about her father, to whom she had always felt closer. After Vicente Menchú died Rigoberta reflected on a happy time she had spent with him some years earlier. During a serious food shortage, her father took her and some of her siblings to another Indian village in a more tropical region three days from their home. At first Rigoberta thought she had found Paradise: "This village was wonderful, because everyone had bananas in their gardens. Everyone had a lot of crops: bananas, plantains, *yuca*,

maize, beans, *ayote*, *chilacayote* [squashes], all the things that grew there. There were so many things, there were things to spare." (191) There was a lovely river, with large smooth boulders, but the place was not as much of an Eden as it initially appeared. Poisonous snakes dwelt among the stones on the river banks, and, on closer inspection, Rigoberta discovered that the children, who had worms and distended bellies, suffered from malnutrition, mostly because their diet was almost exclusively bananas. Rigoberta concluded that this community's problem was that it did not eat corn (the corn crop was taken by the local landowner): "And we realized the value of our maize, the

value of our lime. That is why, as our ancestors said, it is so sacred. It is true that without maize, without lime, a man has no strength." (193) She now understood even more clearly her people's respect and reverence for corn.

As Rigoberta became more actively political, she realized that she had to learn to communicate with other ethnic groups, so she learned three other indigenous languages, as well as Spanish. She realized what truly united her people: "I discovered that all Indians have a common culture in spite of the linguistic barriers, ethnic barriers and different modes of dress. The basis of our culture is maize." (169)

Rigoberta's roots in her "culture of maize" go much deeper than simply preferring *tortillas* to bread, and much of her aversion to changes in food preparation and eating habits was a conscious tactic in a cultural and political resistance that dated back to the European conquest of Mesoamerica. As Ellen Messer noted, "Food can ... serve as a vehicle of 'gastropolitics' which enables one to protest one's position or communicate one's dissatisfaction of the status quo...."

Food as a persuasive narrative strategy in Rigoberta's *testimonio* is thus an effective device both in eliciting reader sympathy, and in framing the story of her evolution from an illiterate Guatemalan Indian woman to a skilled and powerful activist. However, the recent disputes about the authenticity of her personal experiences certainly alter the way we read her words today. Does it really matter if

### Rigoberta's roots in her "culture of maize" go much deeper than simply preferring *tortillas* to bread



some of the events happened to others and not directly to her? Critics are sharply divided on this point. Daphne Patai feels that "Rigoberta Menchú is not admired as a creative writer. She is admired as the embodiment of a certain struggle. For her to be compromised is not okay, anymore than if we found that the diary of Anne Frank was written by her father." (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1/5/99). David Stoll, the anthropologist who revealed factual flaws in her narrative in *Rigoberta Menchú and The Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, nevertheless points out, "Even if it is not the eyewitness account it claims to be, that does not detract from its significance .... Even if the life told is not particularly her own, even if it is a heavily fictionalized heroic life, she achieved what she intended in a way that one person's actual life never could."

So what is the reaction of the reader who has identified in a strong emotional way with Rigoberta's tragic story, especially with the parts which dealt with food? Stoll relates that Rigoberta most likely never accompanied her mother to the coffee plantation because at that time in her life she was being educated in Spanish in schools run by Belgian nuns (159-162). This fact subsequently undermines her story of being victimized by the *ladino* señora because of her lack of Spanish. When I teach this text I purposely let the students read Rigoberta first, and then present them with Stoll's text. They are almost uniformly shattered. I think Rigoberta's readers are so affected by these revelations because we are dealing with a double loss of innocence:

Rigoberta's presumed innocence as narrator, and certainly the innocence of many a reader, including me. As Menchú had said to Burgos: "We only trust those who eat what we eat." How to rebuild the trust?

I think the answer to my dilemma was ultimately both complicated and simple. While at a conference of the New England Council of Latin American Studies at Yale in the fall of 1999 I had sat in on another heated discussion in an attempt to clarify my position. For two and a half hours some 150 academics went *mano a mano* on the subject, until someone finally asked, "Are there any Guatemalans here?" One man stood up. "What do *you* think?" he was asked. He answered, "Lo que le pasa al vecino le pasa a uno" ("What happens to a neighbor happens to you"), and sat down.

Maybe it's time to break out another ration of beans, chiles and tortillas and forge a renewed relationship with Rigoberta's story.

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## THE PERILS OF EATING FEET: The transformative power of trying

I was 19, in love, and eager to gain the acceptance of my boyfriend Guillermo's family in the mountains of Imbabura, Ecuador.

We sat around the table, smiling, and trying to make each other feel comfortable, motivated by our common love for their 24 year-old son. Colombians from Ipiales, living in Imbabura, Ecuador among Otavaleño Indians, the Acostas understood the difficulties of adaptation. While friendly, this dinner was shrouded in paternal warnings ("*una gringa y un gato es igual, ingrato*") and maternal tests. With soup bowls in front of us, we began to eat. This was a family recipe, Guillermo's sister explained, a delicacy.

Somehow, it smelled familiar, but I couldn't quite place the aroma. Suddenly, I was whisked back to my New England childhood suburban kitchen, to the smell of a Pennsylvania Dutch delicacy, an old family recipe that evoked for my mother the memory of the Allegheny coal mining community she had left years before: souse. Throughout my childhood, I had refused to even taste "pig's feet pie."

Now, here I was in Ecuador, ladling spoonfuls of broth from around the white calf's hoof standing in the center of the plate. As I glanced around, I noticed that the other plates contained only a fragment of hoof from which Guillermo's parents, sisters, and brothers extracted a soft whitish substance. I tried to watch them out of the corner of my eye to

figure out how they had cracked the hoof open. With a dry bowl now in front of me, I began gingerly tapping the side of the hoof with my spoon. Everyone respectfully ignored the sound and continued eating. Confused, I turned the hoof over, desperately searching for a possible opening. Finding nothing, I picked up my fork, as I had seen the others do, and -to my downfall- my knife, and began to saw. The table fell silent, spoons and forks stopped in mid-air. I looked up to find every set of eyes blankly staring at me. Someone, finally, mercifully, and matter-of-factly stated: "That might take a while." The entire group burst out laughing. Aware that calf hoof soup was not common fare in the U.S., no one had ever expected me to want to eat the marrow. They believed that in giving me the whole hoof they had spared me the embarrassment of declining. They were wrong. The hoof was so hard, it had to be split with an ax. Once the commotion subsided and tears of laughter wiped away, we resumed eating with a new level of comfort, for in some way it was now understood that although I would never be successful in my efforts in their home, I had tried.




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# Border Crossings

*Making Ensalada de Nopalitos in my Boston Cuban Kitchen*

BY ESTER REBECA SHAPIRO ROK

DEEP IN THE MIDDLE OF A BOSTON winter, depressed by the frigid temperatures and the early descent of darkness, I go to the Jamaica Plain Hi/Lo market for a total immersion in the warmth of an equatorial latitude. Jamaica Plain is Boston's most freely integrated community, and the Hi/Lo satisfies my soul's longings for the fluid rhythms of every version of Spanish, friendly faces from every shade cast by our many meztisajes in the Americas.

At first I went there seeking the familiar Caribbean shades of brown and its distinctive, percussive Spanish. I mostly bought my familiar repertoire of ingredients: Goya Adobo salt, heavy on the comino, which my Polish grandmothers taught me to use for local recipes in our adopted homeland, Cuba, as well as to season my holiday flanken; roast pork at \$1.09

a pound called *pernil* Puerto Rican style but offering a totally presentable Cuban *lechón asado* for my winter parties. The Hi/Lo stocks 10 pound bags of black beans, the massive, satisfyingly moist avocados (the California crowd calls them watery), the selection of frozen or fresh yuca, the industrial size bottles of cumin, and occasionally even fresh naranja agrias, or sweet/sour oranges.

The resonance of these deeply familiar ingredients reassured me that even in Boston I could still make my home fragrant with the cooking smells of my long lost and much missed Cuba. Soon, though, my cook's curiosity about the *productos Centro Americanos* began to overtake me, and I wandered slowly up each and every aisle, stopping to ask the friendly shoppers who surrounded me just what one might do with, for exam-

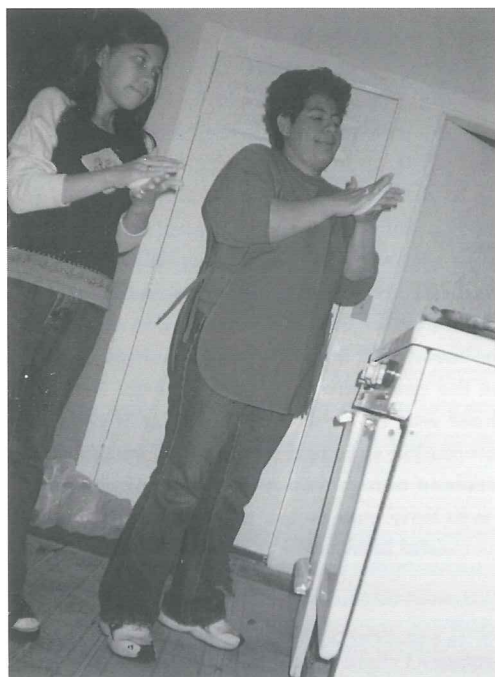
ple, the fresh green chayote squash or the white and yellow cracked corn. Right next to the king-size cans of jalapeño peppers, I found a large can of sliced nopalito cactus, and brought one home to investigate.

Only once, some years before, in my first marriage to an assimilated North American Jew and what felt truly like another lifetime, I was shopping in a high-priced Anglo fruit and flower shop and had found fresh nopal nestled among the high-priced baby vegetables and exotic mushrooms. Nopal is the flat round cactus with the nearly invisible little spines the intrepid but ignorant cook, like myself, fail to see until we have seized it with greedy curiosity in an ungloved hand. After I finished picking out the tiny but sharply penetrating spines out of my hands with tweezers, I did not add them to my fresh avocado and tomato salsa as I had planned (I was in the middle of cooking for 150 soon to be arriving guests and I could not afford any more time-consuming mishaps). But I remained intensely curious, if somewhat more cautious, about what I might do once I safely got my hands again on such an exotic vegetable. Between marriages, my spiritual journey brought me to the Sonoran desert where I saw the wondrous variety of cactus and gained respect for its many versions of sharp spines protecting its hidden riches.

The sliced can on the Hi/Lo shelf seemed like a safe introduction for the now more cautious but incorrigibly curious novice, and I eagerly brought the nopalitos home to try again. This time, opening the can, I learned that once the skin and spines had been removed, the nopalito slices were green and slippery, a little slimy like okra, tender yet dense and resilient to the bite. They always came canned with some salt and jalapeño peppers,

## MY MOM MAKES TORTILLAS

Eleven-year-old Carlos Sandoval, who came to the United States three years ago from San Vicente, El Salvador, took these pictures of his mother Transito González making tortillas and cooking stew in their Cambridge kitchen.





so that the slight fire of the peppers gave them an extra warmth. I had already composed fresh tomatillo salsas, as I had discovered their tart green explosion of flavor hidden under their loose brown paper wrapping, and had added them to a bowl with fresh ripe red tomatoes, my favorite Florida avocados, finely chopped green, red and yellow peppers for their vivid color and variegated shades of sweetness, finely chopped red onion for the contrast of burgundy and white and softened sharpness, all of it of course flavored with plenty of garlic, lime juice and the bright verdant vibrance of finely chopped fresh cilantro.

The nopalitos, once I understood their extraordinary gifts of flavor and texture, called for equally exceptional company to honor their presence. Already enchanted with what cilantro and garlic could do for sauteed shrimp, I decided to include garlic and bay leaf steamed shrimp in a reconfigured salsa which the nopalitos transformed into a more substantial salad. Now, the vegetables in my old salsa could be chopped somewhat larger, the peppers

still thin sliced but now longer, the tomatoes in slightly chunkier wedges, so they could accompany in size and make contrasts in texture to the slithery slivers of nopal and the firm coral colored shrimp. Something in my tribal wanderings deeply remembers the desert by the sea. Something in my soul is profoundly satisfied by the resulting salad with its echoes of ocean and sun's fire awakening a great thirst to be quenched by the hidden potable waters of the cactus. The nopal's riches are so much more rewarding because they must be so respectfully sought.

Boston is a small town full of tribal wanderers who land on her shores and tend to stick with their own kind. Yet as Latin@s have arrived in Boston, first the Puerto Riqueños and Dominicanos with a few Cubanos and increasingly the Centro Americanos, we have realized that there are far too few of us to live in enclave communities with neither cultural nor political links. At the University of Massachusetts in Boston, the working class commuter campus where I teach, I am part of a Latino coalition which rec-

ognizes both our community's diversity and our many connections. When I brought my Nopalito salad to one of our parties, the Mexicanos sighed in recognition and all the rest of the gathering—Puerto Riqueños, Salvador-eños, Cubanos, Dominicanos, Chilenos, Argentinos—sighed with the pleasure of a new discovery. The salad was the first item to vanish from the buffet table, and has become a new tradition for my big winter parties, each bite warmed by desert heat and cooled by desert waters.

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## SUGARY AVOCADOS, MYSTERY FLAN

Food is the ultimate expression of one's culture, and even our smallest assumptions about what we eat reveal a lot about where we come from. Sometimes this happens not only for those who venture into other countries, but to those from similar cultures. DRCLAS Lemann Visiting Scholar from Brazil, Salvador Sandoval, remembers the time he and his wife came to the United States. They bought avocados to make guacamole, which Sandoval knew well, being born of Mexican parents. As he walked into the kitchen, he laughed to find his wife pouring sugar into a blender with the avocados. In Brazil, avocados are not considered fit for salty food, as they are in Mexico.

Quality of food—as well as its cultural context—varies from place to place. In Belize, Norm Beauchemin, former DRCLAS Financial Officer, found that beef presented a real challenge. He was teaching business courses at a community college in Corozal, a town of no more than 10,000-12,000 people, with a hybrid population, consisting of mestizos, Chinese, and West Indians. While the overall menu reflected the variety of its people, the beef could only be obtained from a couple of butchers in town, who would mysteriously disappear in their living rooms and return with clear, plastic bags filled with meat. According to Beauchemin, he would cook it for hours in a futile attempt to tenderize it. "It would've made an excellent sling shot or trampoline," he wryly observed.

Cooking ingredients can sometimes be found in the most surprising places. Who would've thought you could find the masa to make empanadas in the Star Market in Cambridge? De Fortabat Visiting Scholar Gastón Gordillo from Argentina didn't have to look too long in order to make the empanadas with his mother's recipe from Buenos Aires. Empanadas are made in different forms all over Latin America, and usually consist of a thick dough filled with chicken or beef. According to Gordillo, his empanadas *estilo argentino* are made with olives, green onion, and eggs.

Then there are recipes which carry a flavor of mystery. On a trip in the 1980's to Cuba, DRCLAS Outreach Coordinator, Jill Netchinsky Toussaint learned how to make coconut flan from an older woman whom she had met at a party. In an attempt not to break with the oral tradition in her family, the woman refused to give Netchinsky the recipe. "It can never be written down," she whispered.

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# Only Cauldrons know the Secrets of their Soups

Laura Esquivel's "Like Water for Chocolate"

BY MIGUEL SEGOVIA

Laura Esquivel's novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, is a contemporary novel based on romance, recipes and home remedies. The book, set in turn-of-the-century Mexico, relates the story of Tita De La Garza, the youngest of Mama Elena's three daughters, who is forced to remain single in order to take care of her mother in her old age.

**S**HORTLY AFTER ITS ORIGINAL Spanish publication in 1989, Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate* (translated into English, *Like Water for Chocolate* in 1992) received international acclaim. The romance novel's film version, with a screenplay by Laura Esquivel, won eleven Ariel awards from the Mexican Academy of Motion Pictures and became the largest grossing foreign film ever released in the United States. Subtitled, "A Novel in Monthly Installments with Recipes, Romances, and Home Remedies," this postmodern, hybrid novel is written as a recipe calendar. This calendar has been read as a novel that *transforms* the space of the kitchen as a site of resistance, feminist affirmation, and liberation.

*Like Water* has also been interpreted as a womanist narrative that empowers marginalized women like Josefita, nicknamed "Tita," considered by many critics to be the story's main protagonist. However, the novel's title *Like Water* may also be said to refer to each of the six women in the novella—Mama Elena, Nacha, Chenchá, Gertrudis, Rosaura and Tita. And while critics have traditionally assigned the role of "boiling woman" to Tita herself, the other women in the narrative also boil in their anger, frustration, repressed desire and erotic passion.

After Tita's nose is broken by Mama Elena, Tita flees her mother's house with Dr. Brown. This move is read by feminist critics as an act of resistance and affirmation, but what does the move to the U.S. mean when Mexican people begin to seek medical attention in America because "Mexican" doctors "aren't good enough"? Also, what does *Like Water* suggest when we consider the fact that Tita



ends up with Pedro (the Mexican lover) and not with Dr. Brown (the White doctor)? What does it mean that Gertrudis, Tita's sister, leaves the ranch on fire and is then found by a Mexican priest in brothels along the U.S./Mexico border? Do Mexican women who leave home always become prostitutes for crossing cultural and social borders, for becoming *generalas* in the Mexican Revolution, or for defying authority? And when they return home, like Tita, do such women need to be "liberated" by Mexican men?

After Tita returns to the De La Garza ranch—because her mother has been paralyzed from the waist down as a consequence of Revolutionaries who attempt to rape her—she seems more concerned with confronting her mother about the "truth" of her frustrated love than about cooking. Curiously, late in *Like Water* after Mama Elena's passing, Tita is not as interested in the kitchen, or in serving others. At this point, she seems more

invested in pondering, confronting and facing the truth that had not been spoken since Mama Elena's death, claiming "her right to passion," challenging her sister Rosaura.

Tita's relationship to the women in the narrative—her sisters, Nacha, Chenchá, and Dr. Brown's mother, "Kathy, a seventy-year-old North American woman"—help to crystallize Tita's shifting social, racial and ethnic positions. They also help demarcate the sharp class, race and ethnic differences between and among women in *Like Water*. Because Tita is simultaneously a sister, a daughter, a middle-class woman, and a cook, these identities suffice to suggest that she is not *mere* family cook, but rather, is more than the sum of

these different social identities. After Mama Elena's death, Tita mourns her mother *not as a daughter, but as a woman who understands* Mama Elena's frustrated love affair with Gertrudis' real father, José Trevino (137). "During her funeral Tita really wept for her mother. Not for the castrating mother who had repressed Tita her entire life, but for the person who had lived a frustrated love" (138). Again, I wonder why Tita is remembered by critics as the cook, the boiling woman, and the ultimate specimen of victimization without critical consideration of her various positions in relation to other women in the story? If she is victimized by Pedro why does she return to him? Why doesn't Tita remain with Dr. Brown who treats her well? And moreover, what does it mean that Tita's niece, Esperanza marries Dr. Brown's son?



Because of her preference for Rosaura and Gertrudis, Mama Elena rejects and displaces Tita, relegating her to the kitchen, where she is destined to serve her mother and her sisters, encountering hardship. Countless anecdotes chronicle Tita's distaste for cooking, as she deems the practice suffocating, effacing and difficult.

Similarly, several scenes mark Tita's resentment toward Pedro for having abandoned her and for having married her sister Rosaura, as he argues, in order to be close to her, illustrating as it were, her power to talk back, to refuse to remain silent, unquestioning and docile. And while this is plausible, it is also true that she ends up giving up to Pedro's advances, culminating in the passionate scene that caps the repressed desire that drives most of her relationship and her "artful" cooking. Thus, Tita's cooking, like her frustrated love is much more than "liberative," it is *constraining* too.

Many critics argue that Tita "plays" with the recipes like a poet, but they do not explore the ways in which Tita uses cooking to deal with her mother's colonizing gaze. Tita does not liberate herself through cooking, but rather, exercises *room to maneuver* within her mother's space. It is quite suggestive, for instance, that when Tita temporarily moves to Dr. Brown's residence, she does not cook. And while "a troubled" Tita is living with Dr. Brown, the narrator observes that life with Mama Elena was difficult for Tita. Despite the fact that Tita has "played" and taken certain liberties with the recipes—not without punishment and her share of beatings, slaps and bruises—describing Tita's mechanical existence, the narrator points out:

At her mother's, what she had to do with her hands was *strictly determined*, no questions asked. She had to get up, get dressed, get the fire going in the stove, fix breakfast, feed the animals, wash the dishes, make the beds, fix lunch, wash the dishes, iron clothes, fix dinner, wash the dishes, day after day, year after year. Without pausing for a moment, without wondering if this was what she

wanted. Now, seeing her hands no longer at her mother's command, she didn't know what to ask them to do, *she had never decided for herself before* (emphasis mine, 109).

The fact that Tita is  
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Surely, not only do some recipes cause pain, disgust, and anxiety for Tita, but they also produce discomfort to those who ingest them. They provoke unusual, unexplainable, and unexpected occurrences in the narrative, which many critics have characterized as "magical realism." Tita's marginalization is in large part due to her circumscribed role in the

kitchen. Existing under the *colonizing gaze* of her mother, Mama Elena—as well as the other oppressive forces in the story (Rosaura, and even Pedro, as I have suggested) whether because of family tradition, convention and/or social codes, she experiences a life of struggle.

It is apparent from the constant complaints of the women, that Nacha, Tita and Chenchá consider work in the kitchen laborious, draining, and exhaustive, especially, when Mama Elena continually supervises their cooking. In many ways, then, in Mama Elena's ranch the kitchen is a place of discipline and punishment; it is the sacred space where Tita is "taught" by her mother to conform, to subject herself to her power, and to remain silent.

From the opening of *Like Water*, the nameless narrator, Tita's "great-niece" (in Spanish "tia-abuela" or "bisnieta")—frames the narrative by opening and closing the story while cooking Christmas rolls in a *modern-day* kitchen in San Antonio, Texas. She is making them on her birthday, which is important, because these Christmas rolls were cooked in honor of Tita's *birthday* as well (14). She says:

A recipe for turkey mole with almonds and sesame seeds from *Like Water for Chocolate*

### MOLE DE GUAJOLOTE (PAVO) CON ALMENDRA Y AJONJOLÍ

El mole de guajolote con chiles y chocolate tal vez sea el plato mexicano más famoso. Sin duda es el que requiere una preparación más complicada.

Se afirma que este plato legendario fue inventado en el siglo XVII por la abadesa del convento de Santa Rosa de Puebla, con ocasión de una visita a la ciudad que realizaron el arzobispo y el virrey español. Probablemente se inspiró en los platos mayas originales que contienen chocolate.

Los indios ya habían domesticado el pavo. Cuando se introdujo en Europa el «gallo con papada», pronto se convirtió en un éxito culinario en las cortes europeas.

El mole de guajolote con almendra y ajonjolí hecho con chiles y chocolate aún es el plato que se sirve en las banquetes de boda y bautizos. Muchos restaurantes lo incluyen en su menú.

#### INGREDIENTES PARA 12 RACIONES

1 GUAJOLOTE (PAVO) JOVEN (APROXIMADAMENTE 4 KG)	60 GRAMOS DE AJONJOLÍ
2 TABLETAS DE CHOCOLATE MEXICANO O 100 GRAMOS DE CHOCOLATE SIN AZÚCAR Y UNA CUCHARADA SOPERAS DE AZÚCAR DE VANILLA	50 GRAMOS DE CACAHUETES SIN CÁSCARA
250 DE Jitomates de tipo ALARGADO Y FUERTE	1 LIBRADA DE PAN BLANCO
1/2 CEBOLLA	1 VASO DE VINO TINTO
10 DIENTES DE AJO	4 CUCHARADAS SOPERAS DE MANTEQUILLA
1/4 DE CHILES MULATO	4 CUCHARADAS SOPERAS DE MANTEQUILLA DE CERDO
3 CHILES PASILLA	1/2 CUCHARADITA DE GRANOS DE ANÍS
3 CHILES ANCHOS	4 CM DE CANELA EN RAMA
100 GRAMOS DE ALMENDRAS ESCARBADAS	8 CLAVOS DE ESPECIE
	PIMIENTA NEGRA REGIÓN MOLIDA
	SAL

\* La receta original requería más de un centenar de ingredientes, pero los citados son los más importantes.  
 \* Los tres tipos de chiles secos son indispensables para este plato. La combinación que forman el rico sabor a chile del mulato, el sabor picante amargo del pasilla y el suave sabor a ciruela del ancho, junto con el chocolate, le proporcionan un carácter muy especial.  
 \* Hay que preparar la salsa con unos días de antelación para que los sabores tengan tiempo suficiente para mezclarse.  
 \* La preparación del chocolate mexicano se describe en el Capítulo 9.



Cooking in Mexico:  
a scene from a  
luxury edition of  
Esquivel's book



Today he [Alex, her father] is going to come to my house to celebrate my birthday. That is why I am preparing Christmas Rolls, my favorite dish. My mama prepared them for me every year. My Mama! . . . How wonderful the flavor, the aroma of her kitchen, her stories as she prepared the meal, her Christmas Rolls! *I don't know why mine never turn out like hers . . .* (emphasis mine, 246).

This move links Tita's birth and her subsequent *condemnation* to the kitchen as occasions for what I call an *acculturated* "sixth sense," which the narrator and many readers understand as an *essentialist* connection to the

kitchen (7). What the narrator calls a "sixth sense," is for me, nothing more than a *learned* cooking skill that Mama Elena forces upon Tita. This discipline and punishment is carried out by Mama Elena through oppressive technologies of power—via her nefarious, cold gaze (as we witness in the film), her heavy-hand slapping, as well as her obsessive, reactionary, and conventional behavior. As a reader then, for me it is not that Tita is *inherently*, or *essentially* more tied to the kitchen, but that she has been *subjected* to it, and therefore, she has been *conditioned* to perform the role.

In reading *Like Water*, readers must ask the provocative question: what

is at stake for the narrator to seek to hold on to her Mexican "women's" family traditions, despite the reality that they were oppressive to women like Nacha, Chenchá, and Tita? It seems to me that the recipes come with both the happiness and sorrow, the pleasure and pain that the various women endured as live-in domestics in the De La Garza ranch. This point is especially interesting, if we consider Rosaura and Gertrudis will not function appropriately in the kitchen while testing their hand at cooking, nor cook as well as Tita, or as well as the other "Native" women in the story. The text seems to be saying that because they are not "Native" to the sacred space of the kitchen, they cannot reproduce the recipes. It seems to me that Nacha and Chenchá are the *only* two women who are subjected to the role of Native cook in the story, along with Dr. Brown's mother. What is at stake in this rhetoric? Why is it that the "authentic" cooks are the Native Mexican women? And if this is so, why pass down the recipes to middle-class audiences and to other Mexican and Latin American women? Are Mexican educated audiences, as well as American ones to revel in eating Native Mexican "others"? Are they destined to consume Tita's body, as well as the other bodies in the text, which make up the recipe calendar?

I want to return to *Like Water's* opening scene to notice that the narrator forecloses the possibility for other women to reproduce Tita's recipes with the craftsmanship, unique skill, and experience that Tita's "subjected" hands have perfected (109). In the story, Tita *learns* to be the "perfect cook"; she is not somehow "indigenous" or "Native" to it.

Tita resists such essentialism throughout the story. For instance, at her sister's wedding (Rosaura with Pedro), she is teased by two women (one of them Paquita Lobo); she is asked to reveal her cooking secrets—echoing Doris Sommer's reading of Rigoberta Menchú's secrets in *Proceed With Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas*—and Tita replies that they are hers to

## QUAIL IN ROSE PETAL SAUCE

12 red roses  
12 chestnuts  
2 tablespoons butter  
2 teaspoons cornstarch  
2 drops attar of roses  
2 tablespoons anise  
2 tablespoons honey  
2 cloves garlic  
6 quail  
1 pitaya (cactus fruit)

Parboil the quail in water.  
Brown in butter. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Remove petals from the roses, then grind them with anise in a mortar. Separately,

brown the chestnuts in a pan, remove the peels, and cook them in water. Then, puree them. Mince the garlic and brown slightly in butter; when it is transparent, add it to the chestnut puree, along with the honey, the ground pitaya, and the rose petals, and salt to taste. To thicken the sauce slightly, you may add two teaspoons of cornstarch. Last, strain through a fine sieve and add no more than two drops of attar of roses. As soon as the seasoning is added, remove the sauce from the heat. The quail should be marinated in this sauce for ten minutes to infuse them with the flavor, and then removed.





keep. Tita's only response is that she cooks with "a lot of love." This is a compelling argument against the narrator of the story herself who provides us with Tita's recipes along with her family's history. Isn't withholding the culinary secrets not a way of halting readers and cooks who feel entitled to know how to prepare pre-Columbian curative recipes, home remedies, as well as be tuned into "Native" cooking secrets?

Cecelia Lawless' essay "Cooking, Community, Culture: A Reading of *Like Water for Chocolate*" builds upon my argument. It allows us to consider the work's original Mexican (or Spanish speaking) audience. In her essay, Lawless observes that

In the nineteenth century, community cookbooks became a fashionable expression of culinary artistry and an endeavor to link *Mexican nationalism with European elitism*. But these cookbooks were aimed at a very specific literate audience (emphasis mine; *Recipes for Reading*, 218).

This observation reaffirms my suspicion that the narrator is addressing educated middle-class and upper-middle class readers like herself in retelling Tita's "history." We know this by the mere detail: she resides in San Antonio, Texas. Moreover, it is not a new revelation to state that it is a social reality that Mexican consumers that tend to purchase books are those within the middle and upper classes. This is something that the movie, since it became a "popular" sensation helped to rectify. Thus, a consideration of the reception of the text in Mexican middle-class culture is needed. What is at stake when such a "popular" novelistic story crosses-the-border and becomes not only an "American classic," but also an internationally acclaimed transcultural, "ethnic" sensation? As critical readers, are we destined to agree with the myriad critics who read the kitchen as a locus of "liberation," (reinscribing the oppressed/liberated binary) and by that mere gesture also inscribing the "Native" woman to the domestic

space? Are we guilty of taking snapshots of "authentic" Mexican history, and commodifying them for universal audiences and consumers who fetishistically take in its "savory" (dust jacket) "authenticity" (the prefatory note assumes that the recipes are also "authentic"). In many ways, my reading offers a critique of the perpetual fetishization of "exotic," "authentic," and "indigenous" recipes, coming into the U.S. via "American" problematic packaging techniques that perpetuate food as well as other Mexican cultural stereotypes. Class differences between women like Nacha, Tita, and Chenchu are heightened through speech patterns, syntax, accent and pronunciation in the Mexican narrative. The middle-class narrator establishes class distinctions between Nacha and Chenchu, and in other interesting ways, highlights staunch differences between Tita and her sisters. The distinction is further underscored in the three sisters' relation to food, but not just food *per se*, but toward Nacha's cooking. Unlike Tita, they do not consider food and their place of preparation sacred.

Nostalgia for an irreproducible past conjures melancholia for those like the narrator of *Like Water*, who seek comfort in past traditions. At the novel's opening, the middle-class woman mourns the loss of her aunt's Christmas rolls. Interestingly, at the end of the story, the narrator finds herself cooking Christmas rolls because it is her birthday. The reference transports us to the beginning of the story, as it opens with Tita and Nacha cooking Christmas rolls, on Tita's birthday. These minor details—of the dates and the preference for the Christmas rolls—help us reread the novel as one whose time has come full circle, as is almost

always the case with magical realist texts. But as I have shown, my reading breaks, or ruptures this cyclic model of time in order to provide a new reading of *Like Water*—a resistant text that demands recognition, a narrative that contests any kind of coherent continuity because of the respect due to "Native" Mexican cultures.

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Selling corn in Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, Mexico



ELENA C. CHAVEZ <ecchavez@fas.harvard.edu>



# Globalization and the Rural Environment

*Globalization and the Rural Environment*, Edited by Otto T. Solbrig, Robert Paarlberg and Francesco di Castri, David Rockefeller Center Series on Latin American Studies, Harvard University Press, 2001

A REVIEW BY JORGE I. RESTREPO

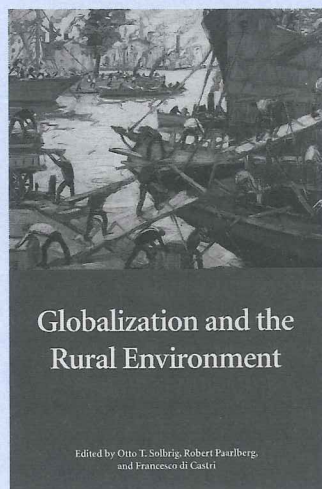
THOSE OF US WHO WORK AS leaders of rural development, training and agricultural research programs in low-income countries find that the daily realities of the field take up a large part of our energies. We dash from the office to the planning group with local communities or with representatives of NGOs; we work hastily to present reports to cooperating agencies; or we stay up late at night to write the next proposal. We face complex dilemmas such as the multiple technological offers from which we must select to orient our programs/courses. In the midst of all these pressures, we can only occasionally escape to find the type of global information that will help us complete the complex map of knowledge that guides our work. *Globalization and the Rural Environment* provides both academicians and rural development workers with an opportunity to structure their work solidly, based on an overall vision. At the end of the day we have to answer this question: What will the environmental impact of our actions be? This book contributes a great deal to the construction of this response.

The book has a solid introduction prepared by the editors, who recognize the hopeless situation of a large part of the population on this planet: "Yet for those that today find themselves trapped in poverty, the promise of a better future is little consolation." This text contains position papers of 40 recognized ecologists, agronomists, economists and sociologists who met at the

onset of the year 2000 to discuss how the rural environment is affected by world trends. Although the group focuses primarily on the Southern Cone of South America, the United States and Western Europe, it offers sufficient points of reference, even for observers of Asian and African countries and from other parts of Latin America. Editor Otto T. Solbrig states that the conclusion of the event was that "industrial agriculture has been very effective in increasing production and helping alleviate hunger, but that questions remain regarding its environmental and social impacts." Naturally, the group also recognizes that it is difficult to measure impact and, even more so, design appropriate policies for resolving the issues that have been raised.

**The book provides both academicians and rural development workers with an overall vision to structure their work.**

The editors have accomplished a very well-structured product: In the first section they offer the conclusions of the meeting and suggest some policies. In addition there are two strong papers on socioeconomic aspects that contribute solid foundations for the articles that follow. In Section II technology is compared with development without



losing the geographic focus and historic context of our times. Then Section III, entitled "Political, Trade and Economic Impacts on Rural Environments," helps us examine the markets as conditioners of development, thanks to six interesting articles that interpret the rationality of those who are now among our principal clients (markets). In Sections IV, "City-Rural Relations," and V, "Summary and Policy Implications," more resources for discussing and stimulating our thinking are synthesized. The bibliography cited by the authors is another important resource that leads us to other texts of great importance.

Rocío Fernández and Solbrig state clearly that if humanity is to produce food at a faster rate than the population growth rate, then two restrictions need to be resolved: environmental impact and poverty alleviation. With respect to the environmental aspects, authors such as Emilio Satorre analyze in detail the agricultural and livestock production system for the Argentine Pampas.

These are interesting references that can inspire local policymakers to search for this type of interpretative analyses in their particular areas of interest (although the article is quite technical, it is still of interest to a generalist).

Miguel Altieri and Clara Ines Nicholls also participated in this process of documentation, contributing, as always, bases for what might be called "a contemporary agricultural conscience," a vision that is not generally shared (this enriches the document).

Raúl Vera presents the diversity of the agricultural sector in the Americas although he recognizes a generalized trend, defining the "stages" in which the different countries are found. It was a pleasure to see how Crosson recognizes that the effects of the climatic change in agriculture are secondary in relation to the effects that the rural zones are suffering as a result of the globalization of the economy.

The book jumps from such specific aspects as comparisons between no-tillage and conventionally tilled soils to the interactions of international markets. Despite these specificities and micro- and macro-foci, it is easy for the reader to find the sections on which he/she wants to concentrate.

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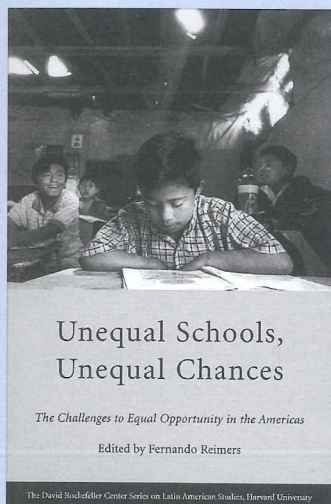


# Unequal Schools, Unequal Chances

*Unequal Schools, Unequal Chances: The Challenges to Equal Opportunity in the Americas*, edited by Fernando Reimers, David Rockefeller Center Series on Latin American Studies, Harvard, 2001

A REVIEW BY NATHALIA E. JARAMILLO

CAN EDUCATION LEAD TO social and economic equity? Think of your own educational experience, your current position in social and economic spheres and how you got there. Do you have substantive amounts of education? Do you come from privilege? Or are you simply an anomaly, one out of millions that somehow seeped through the cracks of poverty, and made it up the social ladder? Perhaps you don't fit into either of these categories, and luckily had access to all levels of high-quality education, regardless of your economic and/or social status as a child. Curious?



Fernando Reimers, in *Unequal Schools, Unequal Chances* has crafted a masterpiece that probes the themes discussed above. As sole editor, he gathered renowned scholars from Latin America and beyond at a series of workshops at Harvard to examine the question: "Is it possible to attain equality of educational opportunity in highly unequal societies?" As the primary source of analy-

sis, Latin America represents a system with the highest income inequality in the world, making it the quintessential host for examining the link between poverty and education. The text clearly discusses and emphasizes the effects of poverty on access and quality of education. At the same time, it exposes varying forms of education reform efforts conceived through policy to "compensate" for the perceived deficiencies enacted by poverty. Most education reform is from the top-down in Latin America, perhaps with a few exceptions such as Colombia's "La Escuela Nueva," created by the local community as a model of education reform.

From Argentina, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Mexico, the Caribbean and the United States, each contributing author reflects on the role of poverty in education and what education policy has done to alleviate such factors with the end goal of increasing educational attainment and achievement for the most disenfranchised. Some probe into the political systems of their respective countries as they connect to the wider education policy framework; others focus on action—what policy has been enacted, for whom, how, where, and with what consequences. A commentary following each chapter prompts the reader to analyze further and confirms or challenges one's own thoughts.

Chapter subjects range from "Education and Indian Peoples in Mexico: An Example of Policy Failure" by Sylvia Schmelkes to "Policy and Equity: Lessons of a

Third of a Century of Educational Reforms in the United States" by Gary Orfield to "Equity and Education in Colombia" by Alfredo Sarmiento Gómez. Thought-provoking chapters by editor Reimers frame the book, asking such ques-

From Argentina,  
Chile, Peru,  
Colombia, Mexico,  
the Caribbean and  
the United States,  
each contributing  
author reflects on  
the role of poverty  
in education.

tions as "What Can We Learn from Studying Educational Opportunity in the Americas and Why Should We Care?" in his opening chapter to the concluding "Can Our Knowledge Change What Low-Income Children Learn?"

The obvious strengths of *Unequal Schools, Unequal Chances* lie in the quality of information, data driven research and analysis, the sequencing of chapters that provides one with different perspectives on education reform germane to one country (as was the case with Chile and Mexico), and the constant focus on equity. Additionally, one can extrapolate basic common underlying themes across different settings that powerfully demonstrate how poverty, an epidemic impacting

millions of people, can propel similar effects on education regardless of geographic location. The difference however, remains on how each context mediates such factors through education policy.

Don't be mistaken, however, this is not a book solely about how to formulate policy, or how to compensate for the shortages of cultural/social/economic capital of the poor as perceived by other classes so that one nation may demonstrate the highest achievement and economic prowess. It is about equity. Equity manifested through the one institution that rests between childhood and adulthood. The one institution that for the general public may largely determine the extent to which individuals can make choices and exert freedom: education. In the beginning of the book, Reimers sets the tone for this theme by stating that education policy addressing inequality must specifically attempt to reduce it. Thus, the policies presented in the book bring one back to that central theme, did this policy address equity?

As a policy analyst in Washington D.C. during a new administration on the hunt for education reform and results, I find *Unequal Schools, Unequal Chances* a useful resource to spur innovative thinking and comparative analysis between education systems in the U.S. and Latin America. Although equity in education differs between both systems, there are several points of convergence, as illustrated in many of these chapters. For example, both systems recognize that poverty



influences educational opportunity. The poor are largely concentrated in specific geographic regions and the effects of poverty on the schooling process warrant clear intervention. However, intervention is a complex issue—it requires money and thus the involvement of the federal or state government to allocate necessary funds. This can transform into a lethal injection, because of the balance among competing and different interests, political elections, and of course, maintaining the status quo. All of which tend to lose sight of equity.

*Unequal Schools, Unequal Chances* allows the reader to

examine how Latin American countries address inequality in education and whether such interventions truly do lead to equity. However, the text necessitates a thorough explication of how equity in access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education coupled with equity in quality of schooling would lead to equal outcomes across all sectors of society. In addition, what is the effect on a country's economy and social structure? At times I wonder whether or not we, who stand in the trenches attempting to formulate policy to improve the educational experiences of marginalized popula-

tions, overlook why extreme poverty exists and why poor children receive unequal chances.

I applaud and am grateful to Reimers for engaging in a dialogue about equity in education and policy. Practitioners, policy makers, government officials, and anyone interested in examining school reform efforts regardless of country of origin, may learn a great deal from *Unequal Schools, Unequal Chances*. Its message is clear, well articulated, and substantiated with scientific research. It calls for action by those who read it, to go back to your field, examine your work, and ask yourself: Is this having a positive

impact on education, is it enough, and does it address equity?

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## Changing the Rules ...or Changing the Game?

*Audacious Reforms: Institutional Invention and Democracy in Latin America*, by Merilee Grindle. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000

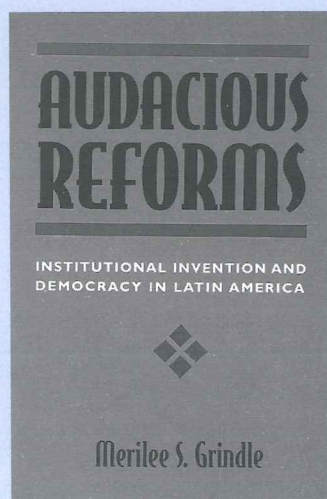
A REVIEW BY CYNTHIA SANBORN

FOR MANY LATIN AMERICANS, the hopes raised by political democracy over the past two decades have been dashed by the realities of persistent poverty and growing social inequality, and by the limited capacity of elected governments to respond to these problems. With few expectations, power has remained highly concentrated in the hands of technocratic elites and modern-day *caudillos*, corruption remains prevalent, and large portions of the citizenry have been excluded from public debate and public services.

It is not surprising, therefore, that since the early 1990s increasing numbers of citizens have become disenchanted, cynical or downright enraged with traditional parties and political leaders. In some cases, these senti-

ments have been expressed in passive ways, such as declining electoral turnout (despite compulsory voting) and negative opinion polls. In others, rage erupted in violent protests, such as the Venezuelan *caracazo* of 1989. In yet others, voters have turned to new political movements and "outsiders" who propose to do away with corruption and return democracy to the people. Among the most successful of the latter was President Alberto Fujimori of Peru, whose surprise election in 1990 and widely popular *autogolpe* in 1992 signaled the demise of an entire generation of party elites—and ultimately of democracy itself.

Having experienced firsthand both the dismal failures of Peru's party system in the 1980s, and the high costs of the Fujimori



alternative in the 1990s, I was intrigued by the premise of Merilee Grindle's new study, which is that truly democratizing reforms can and have occurred from within this region's flailing political systems. In analyzing the

introduction of direct elections of governors and mayors in Venezuela, popular participation in Bolivia, and direct election of the mayor of Buenos Aires, Grindle argues that these were not incremental or cosmetic changes, but truly "audacious" reforms that significantly altered the distribution of power and changed the way politics was subsequently played, in ways that even the authors of such reforms—traditional political elites themselves—may not have imagined.

Why would rational politicians choose to give up power? What accounts for their selection of certain rules and institutions rather than others? How does the introduction of new rules alter the nature of political interactions? These are the central questions posed in this book, which



is rich in detail and a pleasure to read. The reader enjoys a front row seat at back room deal making, as former President Carlos Andres Perez tries to retain a respectable place in Venezuelan history by decentralizing power; as a small group of intellectuals and international advisors in Bolivia cook up the Popular Participation scheme; and as Radical and Peronist leaders in Argentina negotiate an historical pact that would allow President Carlos Menem to run for reelection in exchange for a broad package of reforms.

In analyzing these cases, Grindle argues that institutional change must be understood from theoretical perspectives that stretch beyond narrow conceptions of "rational choice," defined as individual politicians' immediate concerns about electoral gains and maximizing political support. For example, although Menem's desire for immediate reelection drove him to negotiate with his political rivals, Grindle claims that the cost he paid was very high in terms of future constraints on his power and that of his party, and that extensive negotiation of constitutional reforms was not the easiest route to reelection. In the case of Venezuela, decentralization did not play a central role in Perez's electoral campaign or that of his rivals. Grindle concludes that these decisions were motivated by broader concerns about the legitimacy and governability of the political system, as well as the longer term survival of the parties and their machines.

At the same time, Grindle challenges conventional views about the role of social conflict and interest group lobbying. In none of the countries did she find strong evidence that the reforms were advocated or forced upon politicians by mobilized groups in civil society. Instead, she claims that the reform agenda is

best explained as a result of elite projects, in which public intellectuals, prominent legal scholars and others were called together in special commissions—by political leaders—to make recommendations about how to best respond to problems of governance. Yet presidential commis-

### Grindle challenges conventional views about the role of social conflict and interest group lobbying.

sions generally produce reports that languish on the shelf. Why did politicians actually take up these proposals? For Grindle, this is best explained by their perceived threat of systemic crisis. ("Why did politicians decide to give up power?" one Venezuelan legislator told her, "It's easy! It was fear!"). In the face of generalized discontent and increasing violence, seasoned politicians were willing to change some of the rules in order to try and remain in the game.

But did these changes have the desired effect? Did they produce longer term system legitimacy, and did the veteran players remain in the game? This is where the stories get more complicated. Grindle argues that although the reforms had an elitist origin, they helped to galvanize potential beneficiaries and strengthen various groups within civil society. In Bolivia, for example, she finds that rural communities and organizations often responded strongly and positively to the new local institutions of government. In each case, politicians and parties faced more complex arenas for competition, while citizens

gained more options for participating in politics and greater input into decision making about resource allocation. Hence the book ends on a very optimistic note, concluding that these steps did help to boost system legitimacy overall.

Glancing across the region today, however, this optimism seems premature. Despite his lofty aspirations, Perez did nothing to reduce the massive corruption in Venezuela and will probably go down in history as a crook rather than the father of democratic reform. Both leading parties have been discredited, power has been recentralized in the hands of the executive, and President Hugo Chavez seems to be taking his cues from Fujimori (and his notorious advisor, Vladimiro Montesinos) rather than enlightened policy teams. In Bolivia, confidence in government remains at low levels, and the country has been wracked by nationwide strikes and protests that suggest a persistent legitimacy problem. Although no successful outsider has yet to step into the fold, the Bolivian terrain would also seem ripe for a Fujimori or Chavez. In Argentina, new political forces also seem to coexist with longstanding conflicts and persistent corruption at the top.

So what went wrong here? First of all, it seems important to distinguish between micro-level decentralization and macro-level politics. At the local level, changing the rules in these countries has indeed helped to involve more people in politics. This is even the case in Peru, where direct election of mayors and city council members, combined with a new "quota law" that mandates 30% participation of women on all party lists, has considerably increased participation and diversity of local representatives. These changes, in turn, may have raised popular consciousness and expect-

tations about what government can do, while economic downturns combined with the slow pace (or absence) of change at the top may have exacerbated negative public attitudes towards national institutions.

Furthermore, while Grindle's emphasis on the role of leadership and good policy design is heartening to those of us who try to contribute to democracy from our perches in universities and think tanks, these events suggest that we need to pay more attention to issues of organization and advocacy. It is fundamental to create (or recreate) intermediary organizations that can bridge this micro-macro gap, aggregate the diversity of new interests in these societies, build broader consensus for policy change and hold governments accountable over time. Ideally, these tasks should be assumed by political parties, and this region's dilapidated party systems need to be strengthened rather than exterminated, expanding on the kinds of reforms Grindle analyzes here. However, these responsibilities must be shared by organized civil society, and in particular by advocacy organizations that combine a national presence and policy influence with a broad mass base. While a handful of elites can change the rules of the game, it generally requires a strong and autonomous civil society to defend these changes over time and assure that leaders themselves adhere to the rules.

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# Looking at the Global Village

*The Transnational Villagers* by Peggy Levitt, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001

A REVIEW BY MARY WATERS

IT IS COMMONPLACE TODAY TO speak of the "Global Village". The growth of technology such as the Internet, cheap international phone service, faxes and satellite television shrink the distance between any two points on the globe so that it becomes feasible to think about the option of living simultaneously in two societies. But is such a thing really possible? How do ordinary people go back and forth between a developed country like the United States and a small village in a poor country such as the Dominican Republic? How are the lives of people who remain behind in the sending village changed by the fact that so many of their relatives, friends, and neighbors have immigrated? How do institutions bridge the two societies? And what are the mechanisms by which such massive immigration causes social change at the individual and community level? Through exhaustive field work in Miraflores, a sending community in the Dominican Republic, and the receiving community in Boston's neighborhood of Jamaica Plain, Wellesley sociology professor Peggy Levitt answers these and other questions about the lived reality of transnational migration and the ways in which it transforms both societies.

Levitt, an affiliate at Harvard's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, studies the links between the two communities. Beginning in the late 1960s people left Miraflores to work in greater Boston. By the time Levitt began her fieldwork in the early 1990s, two thirds of the families in the town had relatives in greater Boston. Levitt studies both the migrants in Boston, the

relatives and neighbors back in Miraflores and the organizations that span the two localities. She argues that the movement of people back and forth, and perhaps more importantly, the transnational linkages and movement of ideas, money, influence and information creates a situation that profoundly changes both environments and the people within them. It is as if village life takes place in two settings, she argues.

Levitt describes the changes in everyday life for ordinary people—both migrants who must come to terms with life in the United States, and those in Miraflores who do not immigrate, but whose

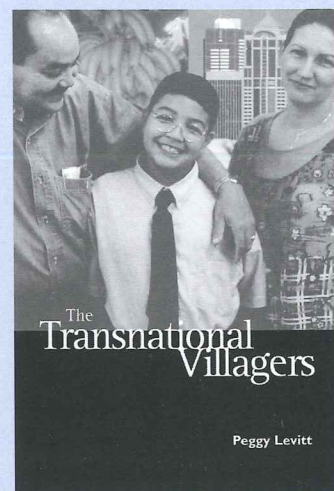
It is as if village  
life takes place in  
two settings.

world is transformed through contact with return migrants, and through the flow of both economic and social remittances. Economic remittances sustain families and increase the material level of well being in the village. Practically every home in Miraflores has a VCR or television or compact disk player, supplied by relatives in the Boston area. Yet such economic remittances also affect the social status hierarchy in the town, changing the value of land as migrants buy dream houses they may never return to live in, and creating ever greater desires for immigration to meet the growing cash needs of those dependent on material goods from far away.

The book provides not only an empathetic and rich account of village life and the lives of ordinary migrants, but also makes a major

original contribution to social scientists' understanding of migration and the diffusion of global culture. Levitt introduces the concept of "social remittances"—the ideas, behaviors, identities and social capital that flow from host to sending countries. This new theoretical concept is enormously helpful in understanding the ripple effects of migration. Thus, Dominicans who have never set foot in the United States are influenced by concepts of gender equality, racial politics and identities, and political practices that migrants describe on return visits, through letters and phone calls, or merely through modeling behaviors that are new and unsettling. For instance, Levitt demonstrates not only how marriages are transformed in the United States through women's employment in paid labor, men's active participation in household chores and child rearing, and the influence of the American norms of more shared decision making in household matters, but also how marriages in Miraflores are also challenged and changed through the growing knowledge there that in the U.S. things are different, and that it is possible to imagine new ways of managing gender relations.

"Transnationalism" has been a buzzword in the social sciences for a decade or so now, but this painstaking research on both sides of the border and the creative and sophisticated model of how such changes actually unfold will surely move this entire field forward in exciting directions. *Transnational Villagers* focuses on religion, electoral politics, and community development organizations that simultaneously operate in Miraflores and in Boston. This dual focus



on individuals and organizations underlines the connections between the two places and begins to answer some of the tough questions about what transnationalism really means.

Finally, this book is also a contribution to the field of immigration studies. It provides a new way of thinking about how assimilation will work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Levitt argues forcefully and convincingly that it is wrong to pit transnational ties against assimilation. Indeed ongoing transnational practices that link migrants to their sending communities are not antithetical to assimilation and full incorporation into American society and politics. The two are not only not incompatible, but perhaps they are the ways in which migrants will become Americans in the future.

*Mary Waters is a Harvard professor of sociology. She has written extensively on race and ethnic identity and immigration issues. Her most recent book is Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities (Harvard University Press, 1999).*



# Children of Immigration: An Excerpt

Reprinted by permission of the publishers from *Children of Immigration* by Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Copyright © 2001 by the President and Fellows of Harvard University.

LARGE-SCALE IMMIGRATION IS one of the most important social developments of our time. It is a transformational process affecting families and their children. Once immigrants are settled, they send for their loved ones or form new families. Hence, the story of today's immigrants is also a saga of their children: a fascinating and critical—but too often—forgotten chapter of the immigrant experience. The children of immigrants, who make up 20 percent of all youth in the United States, are an integral part of the American fabric. This book explores their experiences.

First, a word about our use of the terms “immigrant children” and “children of immigrants.” When we refer to immigrant children, we strictly mean foreign-born children who have migrated, not the U.S.-born second generation. “Children of immigrants,” on the other hand, refers to both U.S.-born and foreign-born children. While the experiences of U.S.-born and foreign-born children differ in many respects (most importantly, all U.S.-born children are U.S. citizens), they nevertheless share an important common denominator: immigrant parents.

The children of immigrants follow many different pathways; they forge complex and multiply determined identities that resist easy generalization. Some do extremely well in their new country. Indeed, research suggests that immigrant children are healthier, work harder in school, and have more positive social attitudes than their nonimmigrant peers. Every year, the children of immigrants are overrepresented in the rosters of valedictorians and receive more

of their share of prestigious science awards. They are regularly admitted to our most competitive elite universities. Immigrant children in general arrive with high aspirations and extremely positive attitudes toward education.

While we name and celebrate the hard-earned successes of many children of immigrants, there are reasons to worry about the long-term adaptations of others. Why should we worry? Because many children of immigrants today are enrolling in violent and overcrowded inner-city schools where they face overwhelmed teachers, hypersegregation by race and class, limited and outdated resources, and otherwise decaying infrastructures. Disconcertingly high numbers of these children are leaving schools with few skills that would ensure success in today's unforgiving global economy. At a time when the U.S. economy is generating no meaningful jobs for high school dropouts, many children of immigrants are dropping out of school. In brief, while many immigrant children succeed, others struggle to survive.

Anxiety has surged in recent years over the continued large-scale immigration into the United States. As in eras past, immigrants have been received with ambivalence. Though immigrant children arrive with remarkably positive social attitudes—toward schooling, authority figures, and the future—we argue in this book that their developing psyches are susceptible to the negative “social mirroring” that many experience in the new land. We contend that the immigrants' original positive attitudes are a remarkable resource that must be cultivated. As a society we would be best served by

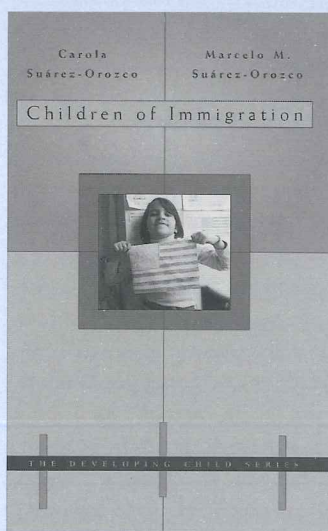
harnessing those energies.

With more than 130 million migrants worldwide and a total foreign-born population of nearly 30 million people in the United States alone, immigration is rapidly transforming the postindustrial scene. In New York City schools, 48 percent of all students come from immigrant-headed households speaking more than one hundred different languages. In California, nearly 1.5 million children are classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). This is not only an urban or southwestern phenomenon—schools across the country are encountering growing numbers of children from immigrant families. Even in places like Dodge City, Kansas, more than 30 percent of the children

much of the basic research—has focused predominantly on immigrant adults. Yet nationwide, first and second generation immigrant children are the most rapidly growing segment of the U.S. child population. The future character of American society and economy will be intimately related to the adaptations of the children of today's immigrants, even in the unlikely case of a drastic reduction of immigration in the coming decades.

A central theme of *Children of Immigration* is how the children of immigrants are faring in American society. What do we know about the children of immigrants? How does immigration affect the family system? How are the children adapting to our schools and making the transition to the workplace? We focus attention on their schooling because schools are where immigrant children first come into systematic contact with the new culture. Furthermore, adaptation to school is a significant predictor of a child's future well-being and contributions to society.

For the children of immigrants today, it is the best of times and the worst of times. In this book we explore the question of how it happens that while most immigrants enter the country with optimism and an energetic work ethic, many of their children are at risk of being marginalized and “locked out” of opportunities for a better tomorrow. Why will many immigrant children graduate from Ivy League colleges while others will end up in federal penitentiaries? For too many of the children of our most recent immigrants, the “Golden Door” of Emma Lazarus's classic poem is turning out to be more gilded than gold.



enrolled in public schools are the children of immigrants. To quote Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, we are not in Kansas any more.

Discussions around immigration have typically concentrated on policy issues and, especially, the economy. With the exception of bilingual education, the debate about immigration—as well as



# Stewards of the Sacred

## *Conceptual Museum of Religion and Art*

BY LAWRENCE E. SULLIVAN

*"The Aleph was probably two or three centimeters in diameter, but universal space was contained inside it, with no diminution in size. Each thing (the glass surface of a mirror, let us say) was infinite things, because I could clearly see it from every point in the cosmos. I saw the populous sea, saw dawn and dusk, saw the multitudes of the Americas, saw a silvery spider web at the center of a black pyramid, saw a broken labyrinth (it was London), saw endless eyes, all very close, studying themselves in me as though in a mirror, saw all the mirrors on the planet (and none of them reflecting me)..."*

—Jorge Luis Borges,  
The Aleph

*"It is possible to contain all the lands of all the Buddhas and the sentient beings in one atom without shrinking the worlds or expanding the atom"*

—Avatamsaka Sutra

IN THE CONTEXT OF RESEARCH universities like Harvard, museums create special intellectual spaces for interdisciplinary work on the world's religions. Religions are centered on display, spectacle, and reflection. Museums are crossroads where research, education, and entertainment are all put on display for reflection in revealing ways. Museums are best conceived as contestatory arenas for comparison and dialogue, and as such are a vital part of the environment for research and teaching in the humanities.

The Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) at Harvard University has developed a constellation of research initiatives involving religion, the arts,

and museums over the past five years. Each initiative is one dimension of a wider long-term project culminating in the design of a conceptual museum of world religions. This ideal "museum" is conceived of as a new kind of institution, one not limited to the display of objects; it is a place for theater, music, dance, film, debate, and symposia, as well as exhibitions involving many types of media and material artifacts. The "museum's" mission is to foster understanding of the diversity and richness of the world's religions in a multidisciplinary space for civic and social discourse. This holistic and broad vehicle of culture includes attention to politics, performance, music, the media, economics, the healing arts, the plastic arts, literature, and debate in its exploration of the world's religions.

### MUSEUM PROJECTS

Work on the CSWR museum projects began in 1995 with discussions about the creation of a museum of world religions as a conceptual project. The discussions included Anthony F. Aveni, an archaeoastronomer of Latin America and Johannes Wilbert, former director of the UCLA Latin American Studies Center, as well as Jonathan Z. Smith, historian of religions from the University of Chicago. Also in the first group were Marilyn Waldman, an Islamicist from Ohio State and Chair of the Center of Comparative Studies there; Isadore Okpewho, the African writer from SUNY Binghamton, and Gananath Obeyesekere, the Princeton anthropologist. At that time, the intention was never to build a physical plant, only to con-

struct an edifying intellectual exercise. In 1998, however, I was asked to create concepts and early content materials for the Museum of World Religions in Taipei, Taiwan, believed to be the world's first museum solely dedicated to promoting knowledge and understanding of the world's religions.

To inform the development of content for the Taipei museum, the CSWR convened a series of six national meetings in July 1999, hosted by museums including the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, The Art Institute of Chicago, and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The meetings brought together museum directors, curators, educators, fine artists, filmmakers, art historians, anthropologists, scholars of religion, religious practitioners, and others to address questions involving the care, interpretation, and exhibition of religious artifacts. Participants in our first series of consultations included Brazilian artists Denise Milan and Ary Pérez, scholars Tom Zuidema and David Carrasco, artists and theorists Amalia Mesa-Bains and Amelia Arenas, museum educator Eduardo Pineda, and museum director Carlos Tortollero. Following these meetings, CSWR assembled an academically and culturally diverse team of staff researchers and curatorial consultants to support the development of a content outline and early content materials for the museum.

The conceptual structure for the Taipei museum echoes themes and structures I have explored in such writings as "Icanchu's Drum: An Orientation to Meaning in South American Religions." One of the frameworks created for the

Taipei museum organizes it as a series of religious lenses of time; each space represents a different religious evaluation of existence in time. For example, there is a religious evaluation of time before the existing world, known

Museums are places  
where fragments  
from around the  
world and across  
time are assembled  
into new orders that  
compose a story  
about human  
history in time  
and place.

through important creation mythologies. Conversely, there is a religious evaluation of time beyond the time of this world, after nirvana or in heaven after death, or after the demise of the cosmos. Then there are the times of a human life (marked by rites of passage through the biological and social life-cycle) as well as the times of human history and the annual cycle of passing years with their recurrent calendars of seasonal feasts.

In many South American indigenous traditions, the contemporary world is composed of temporal shards, signs pointing to myriad kinds of time and reality no longer fully apparent. Myths recount how the prior worlds broke up and scattered



after a flood, fire, petrification into stone, or some such calamity. The role of the contemporary human being is to ritually reorder the scattered fragments or signs of the diverse worlds. Similarly, museums are places where fragments from around the world and across time are assembled into new orders that compose a story about human history in time and place the storytellers at the center of their universe.

### MUSEUM COURSE

Our work with the Taipei museum during the early stages of its content development ended in 1999, and the museum is expected to open this November. This semester I am teaching a new course on the design of a conceptual museum of religions, cross-listed in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the Divinity School. With the help of a grant from Provost Harvey Fineberg, planning for the course was supported by a series of meetings with Harvard faculty and staff across the university, including William Fash and Barbara Fash, Rubie Watson, James Cuno, Rob Orchard, and additional representations from the Graduate School of Education, the Graduate School of Design, the Office of the Arts, and the Divinity School. These scholars and practitioners worked with us to map the content for the course and link student work to departments, museums and institutes across the university and around the world. Drawing on existing models and museum theory as well as on new proposals presented in the course, student teams are working to develop defensible intellectual concepts as well as rich historical and cultural contents for a museum.

A February CSWR conference for museum directors, "Stewards of the Sacred" convoked museum leaders to collectively examine four key topics shaping the rela-

tionship between sacred artifacts, religious culture, and the role of museums as social institutions:

- Museums' mission and stewardship. Since a significant body of material in museums emerges from, and represents, religious traditions, how can museums respond appropriately and respectfully to those traditions, in terms of institutional mission and stewardship of sacred objects?
- Model structures. Some museums have enjoyed success in developing model structures for the exhibition and interpretation of religious material. Others have made well-meaning attempts and encountered serious challenges. How can appropriate case studies be disseminated to best communicate insights and share strategies?
- Planning processes. How can museums create consultations, advisory committees, and diverse

The panels and  
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planning teams that engage both the cultures being represented and the many audiences encountering culturally and religiously significant holdings? Conference participants will discuss how responsibilities can be allocated in order to ensure smooth, efficient, and inclusive planning.

- Care of religious materials. How do religious concerns act as catalysts for change in consid-

ering the ownership, exhibition and care of religiously charged material? The dynamic interchange between museums and communities will be discussed by participants, including new potential roles for museums as centers of social discourse.

These questions were further explored in a series of public colloquia in April.

### MUSEUMS AND THE SHAPING OF CULTURE

The panels and conference concern themselves not only with the design of a new museum, but the significance of the study of religion to existing museums. As it affects policy and practice in many different kinds of museums, the study of religion has become a critical area of inquiry. Impassioned public debates surround the treatment of religion in museums. Issues involving religion and museum practice (such as the repatriation of Native American artifacts, including funerary objects, human remains, and artifacts used in contemporary ceremonies) are significant not only to museums of religion or those devoted to Native American cultures. Art museums, natural history museums, science museums and museums of anthropology are also wrestling with issues involving sacrality and religion, and their struggles are resulting in the most important policy developments in the field today. Long-standing assumptions about ownership, exhibition design, interpretation, and care of sacred objects in museum collections are being called into question in relation to sacred materials and the religious practices surrounding them. Sacred objects engender acts of consecration and other ritual responses, which willy-nilly are occurring inside and outside their original religious communities and are affecting the basic premises of museums.

### CONCLUSION

In the South American myths of universal destruction, one spot often stands out above all others. Insulated from the fire, risen above the flood, some mountain or tree, a rattle or flute, a hole or spring, stays connected to the primordial world and looms large in the midst of ruin. Symbolic of realities no longer fully visible, this place (often restyled as a temple or ceremonial site) serves as the ambivalent center of a new existence. On the one hand, its features represent the worlds left behind. On the other hand, the place of refuge originates a new kind of life. Because the center stays in contact with every mode of being that has ever appeared, it offers access to all the realms that transcend this one.

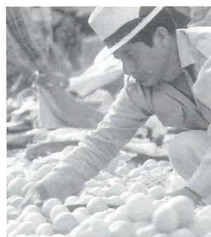
In contemporary pluralist societies, museums mark the crossroads of many cultural worlds; and appear as ambivalent centers both of cultural refuge and new modes of cultural existence. The museum stands for other worlds, which are assembled *pars pro toto* within them. In museums, as in the restless recombinations of products of the religious imagination such as myth and ritual, the assemblies of meaning are never final.

Like the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, the goal of the Center for the Study of World Religions is to work across disciplines, academic departments, and schools. Partnership and collaboration is at the heart of our work. Projects involving religion and the arts at CSWR address our founding mission and allow the Center to enrich the traditional, text-based approach to the teaching of religions in universities so as to serve as a resource for cultural institutions around the world.

*Lawrence E. Sullivan is the director of the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions.*



# What's Inside



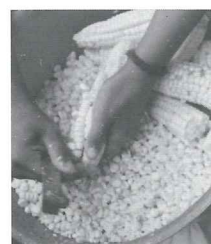
## Food in the Americas

<b>Introductory Essay</b> <i>by Frances Moore Lappé</i>	<b>1</b>
<b>Diet, Poverty, Lifestyle, and Health</b> <i>by Guillermo Herrera</i>	<b>3</b>
<b>What Food? Who Eats it? Why Does it Matter?</b> <i>by John H. Coatsworth</i>	<b>10</b>
<b>Sustainable Agriculture</b> <i>by Otto T. Solbrig</i>	<b>13</b>
<b>Cuba: From Big to Small, Toxic to Green</b> <i>by Minor Sinclair</i>	<b>18</b>
<b>Global Food Fights</b> <i>by Robert Paarlberg</i>	<b>21</b>
<b>Nutrition, Breastfeeding, and Fertility</b> <i>by Claudia Valeggia and Peter T. Ellison</i>	<b>24</b>
<b>Culinary Collections</b> <i>by June Carolyn Erlick</i>	<b>27</b>
<b>In Search of Mexico's National Cuisine</b> <i>by Jeffrey M. Pilcher</i>	<b>31</b>
<b>Photoessay: Food in the Americas</b> <i>by Justin Ide</i>	<b>34</b>
<b>The Maya Hand Down a Recipe for Chocolate</b> <i>by Susie Seefelt Lesieutre</i>	<b>36</b>
<b>Rigoberta Menchú and the Politics of Food</b> <i>by Nina M. Scott</i>	<b>38</b>
<b>Border Crossings</b> <i>by Ester Rebeca Shapiro Rok</i>	<b>42</b>
<b>Laura Esquivel's "Like Water for Chocolate"</b> <i>by Miguel Segovia</i>	<b>44</b>



## Book Talk

<b>Globalization and the Rural Environment</b> <i>review by Jorge I. Restrepo</i>	<b>48</b>
<b>Unequal Schools, Unequal Chances</b> <i>review by Nathalia E. Jaramillo</i>	<b>49</b>
<b>Audacious Reforms</b> <i>review by Cynthia Sanborn</i>	<b>50</b>
<b>The Transnational Villagers</b> <i>review by Mary Waters</i>	<b>52</b>
<b>Children of Immigration (excerpt)</b> <i>by Carola and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco</i>	<b>53</b>



## Update

<b>Stewards of the Sacred</b> <i>by Lawrence E. Sullivan</i>	<b>54</b>
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