

Notes

- 1 "Advance fee fraud" is the formal name for the scam. "419" refers to the number of the law criminalizing such activity. Readers may want to consult www.scamorama.com for more details of this and other web scams. Contemporary irony (from the web): "Festac Town, a district of Lagos where the scammers ply their schemes."
- 2 The connections between and reiterations of colonial corruption and postcolonial corruption deserve extensive and thoughtful comparison, much beyond a book review.

Reference

Goffman, E.

- 1952 On Cooling the Mark Out: Some Aspects of Adaptation and Failure. *Psychiatry: Journal of the Study of Interpersonal Relations*, 15(4):451-463.

Madeleine Ferrieres, *Sacred Cow, Mad Cow: A History of Food Fears*, Translated by J. Gladding, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, 399 pages.

Reviewer: Penny Van Esterik
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Historian Madeleine Ferrieres' book provides evidence for the roots of some of our contemporary concerns about food. Part of a series on *Arts and Traditions of the Table: Perspectives on Culinary History*, this is a scholarly book with much to offer anthropology and food studies. With an introduction, conclusion, index and 16 chapters, the author takes us through the Middle Ages to the early years of the 20th century by way of markets, slaughterhouses, gardens and kitchens of Europe, primarily France.

In the early chapters, we learn about presentism and prejudices about the past, including assumptions about the "good old days" when food was plentiful, and there were no problems with harmful food. Fear of food scarcity has been replaced by a fear about food quality. Ferrieres complicates this model with the argument that perception of food risk existed in the past and included both concerns about the quantity and regularity of food supplies and the healthiness of foods.

Considering the depth and historical detail that Ferrieres pulls from archival sources in each chapter, this review can only highlight a few observations that may shed light on contemporary food fears. We learn of the complexity of forbidden meats, and the question, "couldn't our flesh become like the flesh we absorbed?" (p. 20), and of efforts to regulate bread, meat and fish between 1200 and 1500, including laws requiring animals for slaughter to walk through the city gate, to guarantee that meat that was sold at market came from butchered animals rather than those that had died. Evidence for the intersection of medical and culinary writing can be seen in the importance of the senses of taste and smell for detecting harmful foods.

Ferrieres later links the Columbian exchange to the omnivore's dilemma. Torn between the necessity of finding new food substances and the danger of ingesting toxic substances (p. 87), missionaries in the New World complained, "They have neither bread, nor wine, nor salt" (p. 83), and Europeans struggled to fit foods from the Americas into their food systems. What the Indians could eat without risk was not necessarily safe for others (p. 91).

Familiar foods were equated with healthy foods, and perception of food risk increases with every new food that disrupts the food repertoire (p. 86). Europeans expected the food of the other to be contaminated, and consumed it with mistrust. The book addresses some familiar questions, such as why potatoes were considered poisonous and feared as a food that transmitted disease. Although the rich wanted the poor to eat potatoes, "the poor, too, have taste buds" (p. 110).

By the mid-16th century, Europeans were eating less meat and more bread (p. 111). But Ferrieres goes much deeper into the hierarchies of bread than the white bread—brown bread opposition. In 1669, a conference on bread was held in Paris. Until 1760, the king held a social contract with cities to remain faithful and be provisioned in return. Thus, it became the job of police to control bread quality (p. 120). We also learn of the dangers of beer, considered less healthy than wine (p. 127).

Several sections explore the "silent fears" of the rural peasants of Europe as they experienced gangrene from the ergot fungus on rye. In times of food shortages, more rye grains causing ergotism went into the flour. Peasants "sift their grain in the years when it is not expensive, but in years of shortage, they are careful about wasting ergotized grain" (p. 139). But like tobacco that gave pleasure, Ferrieres raises the possibility that the "drowsiness and dreams" of the early symptoms of ergotism may well have been welcome to the underfed peasantry. In addition, peasants knew how to lessen the risks of consuming the diseased rye. Ferrieres also documents the debates about whether disease was caused by bad air or bad food. Deaths in 1706 in Paris were attributed to the introduction of new items such as tobacco or chocolate or to "an unknown poison" (p. 156). Regardless of the cause, the poor always die first, due to the inadequate material conditions of their lives. Some observers blamed the deaths on the working-class diet.

Urban myths targeted pastries that could be stuffed with human meat, or finely chopped cat. Could the urban consumer distinguish cat stew from rabbit stew? (p. 164). Absentee landlords in the cities of France arranged for the delivery of fresh vegetables, eggs, butter and cheese from their rural holdings. Both rural and urban knew the value of the short food circuit (p. 167). Small farmers sold their best foods and kept the poorest foods for home consumption. Pigs were killed for sale in urban markets; villagers ate fresh meat on festive occasions when it was shared reciprocally, and made do with salted meat the rest of the time (p. 169).

Cattle, kept by young children in collective pastures, were also considered to be sources of contagion and disease among

humans (p. 173). Hungarian cattle walked the longest circuit to market, travelling across the Ottoman and Germanic Empires, spreading the “plague of the steppes” throughout Europe. The author documents both practical and superstitious attempts to control these outbreaks, noting that “the invisible was always close to the occult” (p. 180). Shifts in attitudes towards animals in the 1700s permitted the slaughter of sick animals with guns. Once again, peasants calculated the acceptable risk of selling and eating diseased meat. Dishes were designed to minimize risk by the use of purifying techniques based on salt, vinegar and fire.

The book documents the regulatory role of public authorities, noting their first act was to consult experts on animal and human health. They judged the nourishing parts of animals—muscle and milk—as fit to eat, but banned tripe and innards, the former a staple of the poor (p. 220). Officials stressed the need for individual responsibility in deciding whether or not to consume the available meat, or abstain; suspect meat was distributed to the poor (p. 225).

One chapter examines the dangers of domestic alchemy, and documents how the use of metals such as copper, zinc, lead and pewter affected food and health. Raw moist fruit was also blamed for digestive disorders, while preserves were considered better than fresh (p. 233). Public hygiene monitored by the state focussed attention on air and environment, while municipalities were responsible for food safety, including monitoring slaughterhouses (p. 259). In Ferrieres’ words: “For a long time, everywhere, the belly and the entrails of the city, before becoming a literary metaphor, were warm, pulsating realities” (p. 261). Around the same period (1735), pellagra was identified and linked to the lack of niacin in the diets of the poor.

The science of nutrition permitted the development of the “food as fuel” model of the calorie (1864). From this point on, the holistic understanding of food gives way to the analysis of elements and nutrients, stripping food of its primary association with pleasure. Concern for adulteration continues, and becomes more difficult to trace with the development of processed foods where different foods are combined.

Later chapters shed light on the development of milk as a superfood, threatened by tuberculosis in cows and its potential transfer to humans. The last chapter takes us further afield to Chicago where shopkeepers become consumer advisers to women who were expected to protect their families’ food supply from the privacy of their kitchens, trusting in labels and the advertising claims of brands like Heintz and Armour (p. 305).

The book concludes with the observation that the media plays an important role now in publicizing food fears. Food fears link to the fear of food shortages, the circuit from producer to consumer (the shorter the better) and value of food around the axis of gustatory pleasure, conviviality or health (p. 327-328)

Anthropologists in particular need books like this to appreciate the historicity in the rise and fall of food fears, but we also have the potential and the responsibility to broaden the

range of examples in time and space and to explore contexts and meanings in more detail. Many of our food fears and our reactions to food scares may well be lodged in this European history. But the food fears of our neighbours are doubtlessly lodged in other histories.

Pnina Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims*, Oxford: James Currey, 2002, 306 pages.

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This is a sophisticated and well-documented contribution to the literature on diaspora and identity. The title reference to Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* suggests Werbner’s argument that diasporic communities are constructed or “imagined” through performances by different constituencies (older men, women, young men) in distinct spaces (community meetings, processions, dinners, pageants and fundraisers) that constitute the public sphere, “a series of interconnected spaces in which the pleasures and predicaments of diaspora are debated and celebrated” (p. 15). Drawing on extensive fieldwork among Manchester (U.K.) residents (i.e., Mancunians) of Pakistani background in the 1980s and 1990s, Werbner shows how community is defined by a shared sense of “moral co-responsibility” that is expressed as financial and political engagement with the homeland, and which consists of aesthetic performances in which community members emphasize one or several aspects of their multiple identities as Mancunians, British, Pakistanis, South Asians, Blacks and Muslims.

Composite, “hybrid” identities are not fixed; rather, they are dynamic as individuals participate in different arenas. For instance, despite competition among different political factions as older men support and participate in community centre meetings and elections, through the recasting of contemporary power struggles in religious idiom, they recreate a traditional social order in which they are predominant and superior to young men, whose attempts at presenting their own public events (emphasizing cricket and youth culture) are disparaged by the male elders. Successes by women at organizing public events that present an alternative, less male-dominated ordering of society, are marked by their emphasis on an aesthetic that joins both South Asian ideas of fun (such as contemporary South Asian fashion and film) and traditional religious forms (Quranic recitation and songs of praise to the Prophet).

This discussion of performance and identity is situated within the broader context of Werbner’s desire to understand the dynamics of British Pakistanis’ support for an Iranian condemnation of author Salman Rushdie. “The publication of *The Satanic Verses*,” she writes, “was a conjunctural moment in which citizenship and faith were both tested and revalued, an