Chapter One

Food and Global History

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The history of food is a fashionable topic, and so is global history. Although they come together naturally, their combination is explosive. They intersect so easily because each sends forth tentacles of relevance that reach across conventional limitations of time, region, and scholarly specialization. Both employ vocabularies applicable everywhere. As subjects of study, however, food and global history begin from opposing points of departure and move along contrasting intellectual trajectories—with different purposes, methods, and prejudices. Remarkably, these complex, erudite, demanding topics appeal to a broad public. Articles and programs on the history of food appear in all the media, and allusions to it decorate patriotic speeches and advertising. A reference to globalization (and therefore some conception of global history) has become a talisman of wise engagement with the modern world and regularly inserted in economic forecasts, political statements, and sociological analyses. Although this double popularity has been a stimulus to this book and understanding the challenge in combining two such universal interests was essential to the project it represents.

I

The Appeal of Food as a Subject of Study

Readers who would not normally wade through the abstractions of social analysis and for whom the details of history are a burden will nevertheless eagerly read about the foods and eating habits of other eras and cultures. There are many reasons for this appeal. Descriptions of other societies seem more immediate and concrete when they treat the common experiences of hunger and eating, inevitably invoking personal memories, sentimental associations with familiar foods, and a shock of delight or revulsion at descriptions of strange foods. Travel accounts, novels, and motion pictures all use food to measure social distance and to give immediacy to penury or plentitude. At
home or abroad, colorful food markets are taken to represent something essential and real about culture and society that becomes masked or artificial in supermarkets.¹

This universality of food gives it enormous potential as an indicator of cultural differences and historical change.² All societies must produce and distribute food.³ Their ways of doing so define the societies themselves. All societies construct elaborate rules about the preparation and consumption of food, rules that reveal internal structure and tensions; and apparently no region has been so poor as not to have special foods for festivals or holidays or family occasions. Necessity, taste, social distinction, opportunity, and values all intersect at the table, dictating who sits where, what is on the plate and whether there is one, who prepares the food and who serves it. On great public occasions, the order of service expresses this formally; but food operates as a social indicator even more powerfully with daily repetition. Everyone in Western societies recognizes the social implications of whether a household normally eats caviar or hot dogs, truffles or frozen dinners and whether they do so standing or sitting and in a kitchenette or under a chandelier. In other societies other signs are no less clear.⁴

The production of food is so fundamentally integrated with labor systems and property arrangements and so clearly tied to available technology that diet is often taken to be a measure of economic development (with effects ranging from the elimination of famine to clogged arteries and obesity). Advancing science has not merely affected what people eat but has made diet a concern of public policy, and fortifying foods with vitamins may be one of the most successful, and beneficial, efforts at social control. Of course, the connections between food and the environment and between food and social organization change with the systems of agriculture, food preservation, and transport and are altered by new knowledge about the principles of nutrition, plant genetics, and biological needs. Diet depends on more than wealth and knowledge, however; and experts have sometimes mistaken cultural preference for scientific or economic indicators of the level of development—mistaking the discouragement of breast feeding, a preference for big breakfasts, or the high consumption of milk and meat for universal signs of progress.

Historians find in food’s ties to economics, technology, commerce, and religion particularly satisfying evidence of how ordinary, daily activities are related to larger historical trends. Until the high middle ages, Europeans reclined while eating, at least on formal occasions. The change to a seated position, two leading historians of food point out, freed the left hand, facilitating the use of a knife, which opened the way to the fork, adopted in the fourteenth century following the Black Death. The change in food manners was connected to changes in social relations, furniture, wealth, and technology. Current historical scholarship on food and diet, they add, seeks, “to touch upon all aspects of human action and thought.”⁵
That scholarship can proceed in many different ways. There are excellent studies of foods in single cultures. Specific foods and the customary ways of eating them have been tellingly analyzed as an aesthetic, cultural, semiotic code; and changes in eating can be related to important social and psychological changes, something Sidney Mintz suggests when he asserts that a new conception, the idea that a person could become different by consuming differently, first emerged with tobacco, tea, and sugar—stimulants and products of empire. Interestingly, the urge to make food historically significant is not just the penchant of scholars; in every society, folk histories accompany particular dishes and, like folk etymologies, associate the local and familiar with famous figures, great events, and historical turning points.

The attention to food in literature and art reinforces the impression that whole cultures divulge themselves through their way with food; and the sense of food's significance comes so readily, perhaps from deep within the psyche, that claims for cuisine as evidence must be accepted with some grains of salt. Modern nations, for example, tend to stress the antiquity and distinctiveness of their regional cuisines, especially at times when, for other reasons, regional differences seem important. In reality, however, the promotion of certain dishes to a place in regional identity is often quite modern, following rather than preceding the creation of a nation and the establishment of a national cuisine.

Harvest rituals, communal celebrations, religious and family feasts all use food to infuse social ties with a sense of plentitude and well-being. Foods thereby define and reinforce group membership, and they provide an instrument for exposing the processes of assimilation. Migration, often in part a search for food, carried special foods with it; and there is much to be learned from the capacity of cuisines to spread, to change, and to absorb elements of other cuisines, while preserving their distinctiveness and remaining powerful symbols of identity. Food remains at home in melting pots.

Strongly associated with women's domestic roles, the preparation and serving of food within the family conveys bonds of affection and tends to assert male authority and female power—thus the modern concern that these meanings may be eroded by the spread of packaged foods and the practice of eating in restaurants (where professional chefs, like the corporate executives who produce and distribute packaged food, are likely to be men).

In all these respects, the study of food demonstrates how deeply processes of political and social change can reach into society. No wonder then that commentary on contemporary cuisine is often also a comment on politics, commercialization, the ecology, and cultural decline. Books on the history of food can be fascinating and delightful as they set unusual and interesting details about the daily life of an era within grand (and satisfyingly familiar) historical narratives. Unfamiliar information on a commonplace subject often has an impact greater than its import, and historical lore about food can readily acquire an aura of significance and erudition it may not merit.
Only rarely does the study of food reveal historical processes previously slighted. Can thinking in terms of global history make a significant difference? The chapters that follow address questions of historical importance.

These essays constitute something of an experiment, neither because they engage a neglected subject nor because their authors are scholars from many different fields. The study of food has tended to stimulate interdisciplinary research. The fresh achievement here lies with the engagement of scholars from many disciplines using the latest work in their own fields to think about the history of food within a framework of global history. In doing that they discuss topics of great general interest, subjects discussed in the mass media, matters of official policies normally considered in congressional committees and international agencies, and issues of medical science more at home in seminars and antiseptic corridors. The authors have in common their command of great bodies of knowledge that partially overlap, their willingness to take part in this experiment, and their desire to reach a broader audience.

The Interest in Globalization

Increasing attention to things global may reflect increasing curiosity about the rest of the world; but globalization refers to a fundamental historical process. Admittedly, the weight of the term is lessened by the frequency and intellectual lightness with which labels are used to declare modern times a new epoch—the Computer Age, the Atomic Age, the Age of Totalitarianism, the Age of the Automobile, the Age of Anxiety—but this obsessive labeling may in itself be an important sign of our times. Almost everyone agrees, a little uncritically, that the pace of historical change has become faster; and the need for such labels indicates how fundamentally modern thought is shaped by conceptions of historical change as well as by contemporary concern about where that process of change is taking us. Globalization has much of the appeal of science fiction.

Usually assumed to be propelled by new technologies and by mechanisms internal to capitalism, globalization is sometimes described in the language of progress, with echoes of Enlightenment confidence in the power of reason and of nineteenth-century hope for science and technology. Globalization so conceived brings societies closer together, with benefits that include the elimination of famine and the enjoyment of foods from around the world. Diets that once featured chestnuts, taro, or turnips were imposed by nature; now those limitations have been overcome. From a common biology and through a shared human experience, this progress allows more diverse diets and makes them more widely available as they also become internationally more similar, achieving through food what Esperanto attempted through language.

More often, however, references to globalization are accompanied by allusions to the sorcerer’s apprentice and by warnings of dehumanized com-
merce and environmental disaster. An ungainly term, globalization often suggests a troubling determinism, a juggernaut that destroys rain forests while multinational agribusinesses plow under family farms and capitalism forces peasants to move into cities and work for wages, thereby eroding social relations, undermining local customs, and subverting taste in culture and food. This globalization involves an assault on nature. With respect to food, technology violates the natural rhythm of the seasons and modernity undermines the convivial rituals and religious meanings associated with eating. Ever more available, food loses the savor preserved only in memories of produce fresh from the garden and prepared in mother’s kitchen from recipes so traditional they were never written down. Ultimately, this litany compares the barbarism of gulping hamburgers with the refinements of family feasts and contrasts fruit freshly picked with processed foods deficient in flavor and nutrients. Admittedly, the spread of McDonald’s restaurants around the world would seem to imply some universal attraction or need; yet that expansion is more famous as a symptom than as a success. Part of the interest of this book’s topic lies in the fact that, at the end of the twentieth century, discussions of globalization and food encapsulate such conflicting assessments of the present and the future.

II
Constructing Global Histories (of Food)

Concerns with globalization today have obviously stimulated interest in global history. As a field of study that uses historical methods to analyze
global connections and processes of historical change, global history has
other intellectual roots as well, among them eighteenth-century Scottish and French philosophers, much of nineteenth-century social science (including August Comte, Karl Marx, and the birth of anthropology), and twentieth-century studies of modernization and world systems. As a distinctive field, however, global history can be said to be new; and there is an ongoing debate among interested historians as to whether or not global history is a way of studying all of history or should be limited to study of the modern period.14

For some, the global connectedness of our age is its distinguishing characteristic, a new reality and a change in consciousness of which interest in global history is but one manifestation.15 This global era and its origins, including perhaps the last 50 or 100 years, should therefore be the subject matter of global history. For others, historians, thinking globally as a result of contemporary experience invites a new look at all periods of the past, probing for global connections and recognizing global historical processes of change that may have been underestimated. Such new research would in turn deepen understanding of the modern period itself and should lead to new categories of analysis and new theories of change.
The study of food in global history is unlikely to resolve this issue of periodization. Some themes—such as agribusiness, global marketing, fast foods, environmental concerns, and genetic engineering—are very much part of global history understood as the history of modernity. Others—such as trade in foodstuffs over great distance, even in prehistory; the response of subsistence economies to global changes in climate and disease, and the spread across societies and continents of techniques for producing and preserving food (beginning in ancient times)—extend through history. That human beings around the world are tending to grow taller and live longer is related to the global history of food in the modern era, that food is a crucial element in the relations of economies and empires and religions has been a part of global history much longer.

Some patterns of change are clear. Undeniably there has been an historic increase in the amount of food available (with enormous implications for population and longevity and all of social life), and there has been an increase in the range of foods in prosperous countries and in the distribution of food among social classes. Conceived on a grand scale, global history tends to privilege long-term and highly visible factors like conquest, technology, and economic necessity. The importance of food in human history is not limited, however, to material factors. Eating together, sharing certain foods, and eschewing others have helped groups define themselves and religions maintain community. Shamans and doctors have relied on foods, specially prepared as medicines, to sustain their social roles. Patterns of consumption have been principle indicators of social position from soup kitchen to bourgeois banquet. Family life, peasant festivities, and rulers' displays of power have always featured food; and the symbolic power of food is expressed in everyday preferences, religious proscriptions, works of art, and modern advertising.

Perhaps food can be used as a kind of trace element, tracking the direction of change, revealing the complex intersections of old and new that demark the global and the local but belong to both. The history of food can be thought of as beginning with biology and the hard realities of climate, soil, property, and labor; but it continues through social structure, economic exchange, and technology to embrace culture and include a history of collective and individual preferences. This global history of food need not reject contingency nor deny the efficacy of human choices.

Thinking in terms of global history nevertheless generates significant tensions. When global historians look for connections, they are looking at established subjects of research and are especially dependent on the work of others for the knowledge they have assembled, the theories they have generated, and the very topics being studied. Each of these topics has its own lore, sets of questions, bodies of knowledge, and particular methods that come to be thought of as part of the topic itself and serve to give it boundaries. The study, for example, of a single manufacturing company is always understood
to be a subtopic of larger topics: a kind of product, a form of production, the economy of a nation. Such topics are normally explored within an established conceptual framework and a well-developed scholarly literature. To consider them on a global scale is not only to be unusually dependent on the work of others but to use that research in ways for which it was not intended.

In practice this search for connections often challenges established categories of thought and conventional boundaries between topics. Thus, while relying on the work of others, the global historian is also often subverting it. That may result simply from reversing the emphasis, stressing the connections more than the things connected, an analysis that often reveals unexplored relationships that cut across established categories. It may result more fundamentally from a new perspective, a new angle of vision that significantly modifies the topics connected, that reveals assumptions which need rethinking, and that identifies historical processes largely overlooked. Or, most ambitious of all, it may result from the application of theories about global relations that explain historical processes in new ways. (The essays in this book function at the more moderate of these levels, although the attentive reader will note some striking possibilities for larger theories). Even when happily convinced of having something new and important to say, the global historian cannot forget the great risks in transgressing distinctions that have resulted from specialized knowledge and disciplined methods.

Global connections are not necessarily hard to find, and scholars often know in advance where to look for them. Most obvious are the connections across space, from country to country, across continents, and around the globe. These attract our attention for two reasons. The first is modern experience. The ease of movement and communication, the increase in both the pressures of international markets and concern for the environment have made us aware that all the world is connected. Globalization is on everyone’s lips, shibboleth and excuse, often loosely used; and serious thought cannot afford to avoid the obvious. Connections across space attract our attention for a subtler reason as well. The study of society has been shaped by the fact that travel and communication were for so long difficult and slow, that customs and languages tend to amplify the sense of distance and difficulty, and that cultures are so often noticed and described in terms of difference. The prominence of state and nation, with historiography its product and chronicler, has obscured many continuing connections. When the response to information about global connections is one of surprise, that surprise comes as much from the realization that important ties had been overlooked as from the discovery of their existence.

The analysis of global connections must be attentive to time as well as space. Connections formed in one era tend to shift in form and meanings with the passage of time. The visible exchange of goods may have its most important effects through the ideas and customs that accompany it but only
slowly take effect. Ties that were once imperial may outlast the political connections that formed them. Explanations of how specific global connections began are often easier to establish than why they persist, are transformed, or peter out—promising areas for research in global history. The reminder to be alert for connections across space and over time can be a useful prod to further investigate but is both too easy and too grand to shape research.

Because global history, conceived of as a kind of historical research, does not aspire to create a narrative of world history that leaves no island out, it can tolerate lots of gaps. But global historians face other difficulties. In their search for connections, global historians need an explicit rationale for delimiting their inquiry. Once accepted categories have been denied their truncating power and habits of thought no longer define the boundaries of research, connections can become infinite. The two most common devices for avoiding an endless loop of connections are either to focus on a closely defined subject treated as an example of other nodes of multiple connections or to study a specific system of connections, for which it is then necessary to provide some theoretical support. Both are used in the chapters that follow.

The global historical framework one chooses will go far to determine what evidence is relevant; the theories and methods employed will shape its interpretation. There are, it seems to me, essentially four broad approaches to building a global, historical framework. One begins from universal experiences. Human beings everywhere construct shelter, ward off or survive disease, and, of course, eat. Environmental and economic factors have, for example, led many societies at different times to depend heavily on a single dietary staple. Whether that staple was wheat, rice, potatoes or something else, the production, distribution, and consumption of that staple was integral to social organization and cultural values. Changes in any of these elements affected the others in a process that can be studied. Similarly, urban living, set working hours, and restaurants are now nearly universal experiences that have implications for food and its cultural meanings. Constructing a global history on the basis of a selected set of universal experiences has important advantages. It encourages comparison of how societies meet similar needs and how different social systems respond to change, and it tends to favor research that is empirical and open-ended. Nutritional studies, with their foundation in biology and medicine and their concerns for public health, frequently work this way; and a number of chapters in this book illustrate its effectiveness. Defining historical problems on the basis of common experiences can be done in a way to avoid imposing Western models on non-Western societies. The selection of which universal experiences to study and which comparisons to make is not automatic, however, but requires some carefully elaborated conception of historical change to avoid the dull simplifications that assumptions about universal experience can encourage.

A second way to way to build a framework of global history is to trace the diffusion of materials, techniques, ideas, and customs from one place to an-
other. William McNeill's study of the global diffusion of plagues is an outstanding example; and several of the essays in this volume establish their problematic from instances of diffusion. The spread of previously unknown foods from the New World to Europe and Asia provides one of the great historical examples of diffusion; 20 the contemporary spread of fast foods, one of the most talked about. An important element in historical change, diffusion is a natural preoccupation of global history. Tracking the movement of something specific from place to place over time allows a measured concreteness and chronological clarity that facilitates the comparison of diverse responses to similar opportunities and challenges. Tracing such contacts has a further importance, because every item carries some culture with it and patterns of contact thus have wider historical significance.

Within a framework of diffusion a global history of food might investigate the spread of plants and animals, agricultural techniques (from irrigation, the plow, and animal husbandry to tractors, fertilizers, and genetically engineered plants); the food preferences and taboos carried by religion; or the specific dishes, ways of cooking, and table manners disseminated by travelers, migrants, and merchants. Studies of diffusion tend to favor the concrete and readily identifiable, churches more than religious beliefs, inventions more than social organization, certain foods more than social relations. That can be a serious limitation, as can the fact that the thing disseminated may itself be changed in the process. In global histories of diffusion, significant issues and findings arise less reliably from study of the idea or object diffused than from exploration of the responses to it, which often reveals a great deal about the process of change. In that way research into the diffusion of people, businesses and markets, labor systems, knowledge and techniques, religious or political movements, or public policies can contribute significantly to global history.

A third approach to building a framework for global history uses the formal ties of politics, economics, or culture to explore the creation of global webs of connections. These are most often thought of in terms of trade or empire, relations that lie at the core of many of the best known and most influential global histories published in the last thirty years. Such close attention to economic ties opens the study of global history to an extensive literature on economic theory. Variants of Marxism in particular have contributed to theories of dependency and the world-capitalist system that have been effectively applied to examples from around the world. Similarly, political ties are central to global histories of the shifting balance of power and of competing hegemonies, and modern studies of imperialism have enriched our understanding of the lasting impact of webs of connection. Among the various approaches to global history, the search for webs of connections is the one most inherently attentive to power, another respect in which it fits well with contemporary social science, and is useful for the kind of ecological analysis in some of the following chapters.
Webs of connection built on trade in food (and in tobacco, tea, and opium) have been crucial in many periods of history. Trade in wine and olive oil in the ancient world, the flow of grain in the Roman empire, the demand for spices in the middle ages, and the transatlantic exportation of meat and grain have often structured accounts of European history. Food was also an important commodity on the comparably important trade routes of Asia and the Middle East. Investigating global connections through food underscores the importance of cultural and social factors such as language, religion, and migration in sustaining webs of connections. From Japan to the European Union and North America, battles over the quality and effects of foreign foods show the continuing importance of symbolic associations as well as economic interests. Intimately related to personal style and social practice, food consumption (like a preference for wine, beer, espresso, or Coca-Cola) flourishes at the intersection of the local and the global. These examples also point to significant changes in the contemporary world; for the global history of food brings to the fore the role of international marketing in today's economy, when the capacity to create demand and to domesticate imported products is one of the marks of corporate capital. There is a dangerous tendency, however, to confuse connection with hegemony and to assume that vectors of influence flow in only one direction. Global historians (unlike nativists who fear the effects of importing foreign foods) cannot assume that imported practices arrive unfiltered or that such encounters transform culture, for there is exciting research to be done on when elective affinities do and do not obtain and when they form webs of connection.

A fourth way of building toward a framework of global history looks at cultural encounters, not simply as conflicts but as a process of change in which cultural identities are formed and altered. Many elements of this can be found in what is thought of as the history of civilizations, global history differing primarily in a lesser commitment to seamless narrative and a greater focus on the processes of historical change. Global history constructed around cultural encounters, which uses established work on religion, language, and society, has strong resonance with late-twentieth-century concerns about nationalism, fundamentalism, and ethnic identity. Applied to the place of food in global history, it probes the ways in which foods function as cultural symbols and markers of difference. The array of examples (rice, the beef of old England, couscous, rye bread, curry, borscht, tortillas) is extraordinary, and so is the range of purposes to which they have been put. Foods can demark cultural difference and define community. Specific foods have long been associated with particular groups, and it has been common to associate the foods of a region with its climate and terrain as the basis for a description (and implied explanation) of the character of the inhabitants. In the nineteenth century, as the choice of food increased, nationalism flourished, and the limited diets of the poor became all the more noticeable, proletarian foods quickly became a (usually disparaging) nickname for other nations: potato-eaters, limeys, frogs, and krauts.
The examples are so interesting that they are often cited on the way to conclusions already familiar, but the study of cultural encounters has much more to offer to global history. The process of codification whereby the diets of ordinary people came to be a mark of identity associated with particular festivals and ethnic groups is historically important. Increased awareness of others and greater freedom of choice provoked issues of identity; consciousness of change stimulated inventive uses of the term, traditional. Global cultural encounters expand and alter that consciousness and those choices. Distinctive foods, recodified in ethnic restaurants around the world, became part of shifting balances between the exotic and the familiar, as several chapters here demonstrate. Food provides a sensitive indicator of the melding of global and local; and study of how cuisines adapt to new circumstances (or are adapted by elites, restauranteurs, migrants, advertisers, and international social agencies) can provide a useful counterweight to the tendency to think of global history in terms of impersonal, predictable, and irresistible forces. The intersection of larger trends and individual choices, of great forces and local groups, of structures and cultures that has given vitality to all forms of history remains essential for global history, too.

**Constructing Histories of Food (in a Global Context)**

Global historical frameworks developed from histories of universal experiences, diffusion, webs of connections, or cultural encounters are all applicable to global histories of food. There is much to build on. The historical literature on food is considerable; and although most of it was written independent of any special concern for global history, its extension to global frameworks follows logically. This potential can be found in the histories of single foods; of food, famine and demography; of human nutrition; of food as a cultural marker, distinguishing one culture from another; of the trade in food and of the systems of landholding and labor on which it rests; and of agribusiness and the international capital and marketing it involves.

There are marvelous histories of particular foods that, by reaching across vast expanses of time and geography, reveal continuities and relationships that are the ligaments of global history. One of the most impressive is Redcliffe Salaman’s history of the potato, and there are a number of others. The intellectual pleasures of contemplating the multiple and often surprising ways a single food connects to social history can be savored in Toussaint-Samat’s encyclopedic account of foods, which considers the berries and animals of the wild, cultivated grains and fruits, locally varied yet ubiquitous alcoholic drinks, and more exotic products, some of which like spices and coffee, became featured items of world trade. Sydney Mintz’s remarkable study of sugar begins with the universal human appeal of sweetness; follows the diffusion of techniques used to cultivate and consume sugar; examines
the trade in sugar and the imperial connections, plantation systems, and slavery that developed around that trade; and explores the cultural changes associated with sugar consumed as medicine, condiment, and luxury but differently by different social classes. "Uses," he notes, "determine meanings," a point crucial in thinking about food in global history precisely because the cultural habit is to think of that relationship in reverse. 25

Scarcity and famine are also topics that invite a global outlook. At the beginning of the modern, industrial era, the Reverend Malthus argued that only war, disease, and famine prevented overpopulation, which otherwise would foster all three scourges on an unprecedented scale. Ever since, as populations continued to increase, the question of whether scientific knowledge, technology, and social organization could provide the food to sustain such growth has remained central. This concern—important to contemporary discussions of economic development, population planning, international aid, and environmental policies—has also greatly added to historical research and understanding. Much as tree rings register the quality of each growing season, a society's system of food supply can be read as the skeletal remains of its social structure and the vicissitudes that it had to meet. Archaeologists and historians study the ratios of population to land, the efforts to establish an adequate water supply (crucial elements in the development of the fertile crescent between the Tigris and Euphrates and in the stability of Asian, Roman, and pre-Columbian civilizations), the impact of technology from animal harnesses and moldboard plows to gasoline engines, new fertilizers, and pesticides. Scholars have learned to give close attention to the importance of food stuffs for the development of trade routes and empires from the date palms of the ancient world and the spice trade of the middle ages to developmental change in the last fifty years. 26 Issues of food supply run through history from the most ancient periods to the present. 27

Famine is often thought of as a natural disaster about which little could be done. Historians, however, find that for the last several centuries at least governments could make all the difference, and thus famine should not be dismissed from historical analysis as an external pressure on society but should rather stimulate questions about the human policies that made it possible. 28 The effects of famine are far-reaching, and responses to its tragedy have served political, imperial, and political interests. The demographic effects of famine tend to be statistically minor compared to its psychological and social effects; but population growth, one of the great themes of global history, is due in part to the increasing provision of sufficient food to strengthen resistance to disease. Like demography, the science of nutrition examines universal aspects of human biology in very specific contexts. Nutritionists know the physiological effects of specific foods and the nutritional elements they contain; for recent times, at least, these researchers know a great deal about the effects of dietary change. And they have considerable experience of public policy; of the impact on it of cultural, economic,
and political factors; and of its often unexpected outcomes. This can be a tool for uncovering large-scale historical trends. Food, the object of considerable record keeping, makes an invaluable historical indicator.

Which plants and animals are considered to be food varies with culture; and what is eaten, how it is prepared, and who eats it, often needs to be studied in quite local terms yet raises important questions about how societies function. Anthropologists have long made use of this, and food practices can be the basis for stimulating comparisons between societies, including some very distant in time, and for analyzing patterns of change.

Food has been an important item of trade since ancient times; and increasing global trade has spread plant and animal varieties, added greatly to the variety of foods available in wealthier societies, and created powerful networks of distribution and processing. These developments have not all pointed in one direction, however. It can be argued that economic ties have also reduced the variety of foods available in developing countries, pushing them to produce single crops for international markets. International agribusiness can also drive peasants into city slums, favor high-yield grains that provide reduced nutrition, and harm the environment as well as health by making regions once self-sufficient (admittedly at low levels) dependent on imported foodstuffs and the exportation of goods produced at low wages. These are primarily modern phenomena, and there is disagreement about their extent and long-term effects, a disagreement that is in effect an argument about their place in global history. Many current practices are clearly extensions of patterns developed following the great European expansion of the sixteenth century. Staple foods and foods that are major exports have always been closely tied to a society’s labor system, and dramatic examples include the latifundia of ancient Rome, the labor-intensive production of rice in China and Japan, and the reliance on slavery in the sugar islands. From the nineteenth century to the present, the modern food industry has often relied on cheap labor in poor countries to produce foods sold in rich markets.

As a subject, then, food lends itself especially well to the study of global historical patterns, connecting elements of history that are more often studied in isolation. Because foodways intersect so concretely with economics, politics, social structure, and culture, the history of food is remarkably suggestive. Yet histories of food must accomplish more than that if they are to add to the understanding of global history.

III

This conjunction between histories of food and global history facilitates our project but says little about how specific studies should be formulated. Although this is not the place for a disquisition on methodology and global history, it is useful while reading the chapters that follow to bear in mind the concerns that shaped them. Like all good history, global histories should
address important historical problems. Identifying those to be considered is a critical step. The four, broad global historical frameworks discussed above, used with whatever degree of deliberation and whether separately or in combination, can be helpful but are not enough. Theories, or at least certain conceptions, of global historical processes direct the scholar’s attention to the kind of events and practices likely to be important. Investigating those more closely provokes a series of questions, leading to further explorations. And all of this, from beginning to end, evolves from the author’s initial interests, which are necessarily delimited in time and place and topic. Influenced by available data and current discussions, these interests also reflect the traditions and methods of particular academic disciplines. Along the way, this posing of questions and persistent probing leads to the recognition of significant problems in global history that can be given the definition and delimitation necessary for systematic investigation.

Finding coherent patterns in history is a resounding challenge, tracing them through time and space an enormous satisfaction, and attaching them to specific cases a critical contribution to historical understanding. For that to work, global history, as a field of study, must be able to proceed from the specific to the general as well as the reverse. The essays that follow do that. They emphasize different global connections. Their authors do not always agree about the global historical processes that matter most. Yet all attend to ecology, economics, technology, and politics and are alert to issues of culture, social class, and gender as they track the interaction of global and local factors. Writing on diverse societies and starting from different fields of research with their own vocabularies, data, and methods, these authors nevertheless address related, and important, issues about food in global history.

The Processes of Global History

The four essays in this section all analyze processes of change in foodways but do so on very different scales, moving from a truly global conception of change through human history, to a comparative study of Chinese and Indian responses over several centuries to new foods from the Americas, to an assessment of restaurants and travel as agents of change, to the cultural constructions of an ethnic minority that moved from North Africa to metropolitan France. Each essay uses all of the approaches to building a global framework discussed above; yet each begins from an emphasis on one of them.

In Chapter Two, “Going in Circles: The Political Ecology of Food and Agriculture,” Harriet Friedmann starts from the universal, the complex balance of nature that evolves in place and purpose. This framework leads to an evolutionary perspective on how human beings, seeking the sustenance life requires, have benefited from, worked with, and battled against various ecological niches. That provides a way to identify major historical transformations; and Friedmann emphasizes in the last three centuries the Columbian
exchange (the subject of Chapter Three), the global expansion of European power, and the decline of the household economy with industrialization, a radical break that made food a commodity. The themes she identifies are taken up again and again in this volume. Through her focus on ecology, she outlines a chain of being from bacteria to human relations that connects environment, economy, social system, urban-rural relations, techniques of production, family structure, and social values. Her political ecology becomes an impassioned warning against miscalculations of efficiency and profit (consider mad cow disease, discussed in Chapter Fourteen) and against the dangers of losing genetic diversity. Attention to place, primarily Great Britain and the United States, provides evidence for a social vision and a cultural program (echoed in the last chapter of this book).

The global framework that Sucheta Mazumdar uses in Chapter Three starts from the most visible example of diffusion in the history of food, the spread of plants from the New World following European exploration. She then identifies a significant historical problem, for “The Impact of New World Food Crops on the Diet and Economy of China and India, 1600–1900” explores two strikingly different responses to these new crops, especially sweet potatoes, maize, and peanuts. The contrast between China and India was not the matter of a moment but lasted for centuries. It began with China’s agricultural revolution, much earlier than Europe’s, and it had implications for demographic growth and political revolts as well as national cuisines. Attentive to plant histories, ecology, and local economies, Mazumdar’s analytic comparison emphasizes the importance of land-holding patterns, peasant proprietors, and the role of the state (providing valuable background for the discussion in Chapter Thirteen of Japan’s response to imported foods). Institutions, policies, and ordinary people created the difference, using crops differently and in ways that affected the history of great civilizations.

Global frameworks can thus point to, and clarify, critical, long-term processes. They can also illuminate transformations that occur on a shorter time scale. Rebecca Spang also writes about diffusion in Chapter Four, but her emphasis is on the restaurant as a site of cultural encounter, between people from the provinces and urban sophisticates, consumers from different social classes, and travelers from different cultures. “All the World’s a Restaurant: Gastronomics of Tourism and Travel” contains a number of surprises. Placed in a global context, the restaurant is seen to be far from universal and hardly some artless, natural development; its rise needs to be explained. Associated from birth with travel, it was then inventively made a kind of substitute for it. This is a modern story, in which modern concerns for health and the technologies of modern travel intersect with commerce and the wealth and taste of the middle class to create an institution—the restaurant—that codifies cuisines and makes the exotic accessible and safe. In the process of becoming global, this orchestrated form of cultural encounter preserved
something of older, local ways the representation of social and ethnic identities and an essential marker of the modern way of life around the world.

Cultural encounter is also central to Joëlle Bahloul’s close study of North African Jews. But Chapter Five, “On Cabbages and Kings: The Politics of Jewish Identity in Post-Colonial French Society and Cuisine,” builds its global framework from the webs of connections within which the Jews of North Africa have for centuries been situated. Their eating patterns recapitulated their position between Muslim neighbors and French governors. Subsequently carried into France, that way of eating underwent further compromises between ancient Jewish law and the attractive opportunities of French republican society. Bahloul’s research on food practices that developed, informally and in the home, weighs the impact of migration, economic development, and political climate as well as issues of ethnic, religious, and class identity in a case study of responses to modern social change. It reveals a subtle and complex process that intermingles rituals with shifting symbolic meanings and constructs changing boundaries within the fields of tension created by the promises and threats of integration. In four frameworks of different chronological and geographic scale, these studies of food reveal much about global historical processes.

Public Policy and Global Science

The chapters in this section constitute a rather different experiment. International agencies and programs for world health and economic development are in themselves forces for global change. Global thinking is, in a sense, built into the disciplines represented here, while the policies they advocate must deal with immediate, often pressing, local issues. Written by experts who study universal nutritional needs and design public policies to meet those needs, these chapters concentrate on modern conditions, especially in countries undergoing rapid change. These authors assess their own fields of research and the policies they have fostered with remarkable critical balance. Placing those practices within global patterns, uncovers trends that influence research itself as well as policies on nutrition and food supply. Public policies formulated in the name of science and public welfare, are often shaped by fashions, ideologies, commercial interests, and political considerations that reach around the world. Two generations ago, protein deficiency was a principal target, one now overshadowed by concern for nutritional balance and the risks from excessive consumption of sugar and fat. That change results from new knowledge, of course, but also from the experience of the developed world with the worrisome indulgences of prosperous people. While acknowledging the dangers of imposing on one society standards derived from another, policy makers face shifting targets; for the societies they seek to help, whether rich or poor, are rapidly changing through their participation in global historical trends.
The production of food has always been one of society’s most important purposes, and Elisabet Helsing begins with that historical perspective in Chapter Six on “Food and Nutrition Trends, East and West.” Governments have always had to be concerned about supplies of food; and in those terms, as she points out, food policy is nothing new. The idea that governments should establish national policies based on the latest findings in nutrition science is, however, quite new and itself a product of global historical trends. The results are mixed. Policies, even those favored by United Nations agencies, may be influenced by commercial interests and political considerations for which public health benefits are at best secondary. Nutrition science itself reflects the cultures from which it comes as well as the theories currently in vogue. Helsing develops these points with courageous independence, starting with a look at Europe as a whole, contrasting the greater autonomy of nutrition scientists in the United States from commercial pressures, then more closely studying differences among the Nordic countries. They offer a rare instance in which per capita food production has been declining and where governments, starting with Norway, the first nation to have a nutrition policy, have pioneered in applying nutritional standards. She then turns to the telling and troubled case of the Soviet Union. Its subsequent breakup reveals in contemporary crisis how nutrition policies were frozen in the knowledge and ambitions of the 1930s, to be maintained for food as for industrial organization or the arts within the amber rigidity of Soviet bureaucracy. In all these instances, the results in terms of what people eat and the state of their health demonstrate the importance of public policies but also the degree to which these policies in turn reflect global influences on politics, economics, and science itself.

In Chapter Seven Della McMillan and Thomas Reardon address classic issues of development and international economic aid as it affects “Food Policy Research in a Global Context: the West African Sahel.” The impact of global trends stand out starkly in a region where even the harsh constraints of poverty and aridity do not lessen the variety of factors—economic, social, and cultural—involving in changing the production of food. Keenly aware of this complexity, McMillan and Reardon ponder the efficacy of research itself in bringing about desirable change. Policies stimulated by international agencies and external ideologies are inevitably transformed as they function within specific societies. Cultures and social structures remain tightly tied to a distinctive environment, and local leaders have their own sets of ideologies and ambitions. The path from international research and experts’ recommendations to the creation of local jobs and higher living standards is not direct. For all that, McMillan and Reardon sustain a sense of calling that leaves them optimistic about the value of research. Research, they conclude, can, by acknowledging its practical limitations, contribute to the more efficient production and better distribution of food in difficult and undeveloped regions, even as global patterns of aid, trade, and urbanization sweep over them.
Issues of nutrition, development, and global processes come together differently and with particular clarity in Chapter Eight, by Noel Solomon, on "Childhood Nutrition in Developing Countries and Its Policy Consequences." Focusing sharply on the special, and morally compelling, issues of child nutrition, especially in the Caribbean, he expands on the impact of imperialism and such international agencies as the World Bank and the World Health Organization that was mentioned in the preceding two chapters. He measures development in terms of the peoples newly affected by it and warns against Eurocentrism and the adoption of North American standards for the normal height and weight of children. He views the shifting equilibria established within local ecologies in response to global pressures as a cultural achievement; and, while recognizing the opportunities (including better health) that arise from global change, he never forgets that the knowledge of Western science is limited and its dogmas usually impermanent. The very training given experts in nutrition is, he notes, a reflection of global pressures. Applying the latest findings of nutrition science, nevertheless, Solomon lays out the multiple elements essential to childhood diet and offers alternative assessments of what balanced diets mean and how they can be achieved. That opens a prospect that, he shows, is relevant to many regions of South America, Africa, and Asia—and an open-ended perspective on global history, past and future.

Global Systems and Human Diet

The essays so far, on the global processes affecting the production and availability of food and on public policies reflecting preferences for some foods over others, have all mentioned some changes in what people actually eat. That is brought to the fore in the next three chapters, all of which address the question of why there are global patterns of dietary change and their relationship to health.

Here, too, the conceptual challenge lies in the complexity of multiple interconnections that give food a place in global history. Jeffrey Sobal directly addresses that complexity in Chapter Nine. "Food System Globalization, Eating Transformations, and Nutrition Transitions," provides an ambitious overarching schema for comprehending global patterns in dietary change. The familiar evolution from hunting and gathering to settled agriculture to industrial society and to global exchange is analyzed as a series of intersecting systems. Food and nutrition in a given society also constitute a system, composed of subsystems of producers, consumers, and nutritional results. The foods any group consumes come primarily from surrounding regions, called foodsheds, but these have expanded as cheaper, faster transport and new techniques of preservation draw food stuffs from ever larger areas and eventually the entire world. This process, Sobal declares, has created major historical changes, which he labels eating transformations, nutrition transi-
tions, and health outcomes. Concentrating on the period since industrialization, he notes the role of taste (closely analyzed in the next chapter) and restaurants (the subject of Chapter Four) and assesses the impact on health (continuing the discussion in Chapters Six and Eight). This schema, which reviews economic, political, and cultural approaches to globalization, pulls together much that has gone before (in a view more optimistic than Friedmann’s in Chapter One) and points to much that follows in the subsequent chapters.

Adam Drewnowski is concerned with a specific but fundamental, historical change in “Fat and Sugar in the Global Diet: Dietary Diversity in the Nutrition Transition.” Chapter Nine considers one of the most talked-about issues of diet and health, the (dangerously excessive) consumption of sugar and fat. As he makes clear, the subject, mentioned in several other chapters as well, is not merely controversial but ideologically sensitive, the product of differing definitions of good health and of differing attitudes toward modern change. Using the concept of transition, adapted from demography, he treats dietary change as a general transition from one pattern of consumption to another. That transition, he argues, is a cross-cultural one, the result of an inherent and healthy human preference for variety. Moving from the familiar North American experience, he uses empirical evidence to expose a similar pattern in Asia, with evidence from China and Japan (the subject of Chapter Fourteen). Drewnowski thereby makes the case that the taste for sugar and fat is universal in human beings, that consumption of them both has indeed tended to increase over time, that this pattern of increase is remarkably trans-cultural (however much its fame in the United States may be related to cultural traditions of meat and potatoes), and that this universal, historical tendency to consume more sugar and fat can be correlated with increased wealth—a stunningly clear and global, historical pattern. The disagreement, then, is about values, about whether this transition is good or harmful, as many international agencies (and as the many Americans discussed in Chapter Fourteen) assume.

The relationship between global systems and the choice of food made recent headlines around the world with reports of a mysterious and catastrophic disease; and in Chapter Eleven on “The ‘Mad Cow’ Crisis: A Global Perspective,” Claude Fischler lucidly exposes its relationship to industrial production (the availability and use of bone meal in feed), to the scientific analysis of the causes of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy and its transmissibility, and to the role of governments in the regulation of food production and public health measures. As news reports circled the globe, the disease created a world-wide scare, with dramatic effects on international markets and the sale of meat. Within this impressively global context, each society responded somewhat differently and in ways that reflected its own traditions of eating, public health, and general suspiciousness; and Fischler notes in particular the contrast between attitudes in northern and Mediterranean Europe. Prejudices
(toward other nationalities, modern science, or urban life) and ideologies (about the dangers of free markets, the industrial production of food, and the eating of meat—a subject of taboos from prehistory to the present)—came into play. These reactions, not always closely tied to real risks, exemplify another aspect of global connections, one that echoes through the history of public health regulations. Similar outbreaks of concern can be expected in the future, too, as new techniques such as the genetic alteration of plants, themselves products of international efforts, can be expected to spread rapidly and to provoke greater contentiousness, mobilizing scientists, interest groups, and health experts to do battle in ideological conflicts often inflamed by exaggerated claims, misplaced certitude, and ancient fears.

**Eating Together Globally**

Of all food’s connections to human society, none is more interesting than its ties to culture. As symbol, center of ritual, and marker of cultural boundaries, it is universally understood to be an expression of identity and the representation of a social group. The food that matters is shared commensally, within the family or at a public feast; and the foods employed in these daily and seasonal rituals evoke family ties, Denmark community, and seem to embody culture in some immemorial way. Yet the foods served, the ceremonies that go with them, and the meanings constructed around them do change nevertheless and for all the reasons discussed in previous chapters. What people eat, under what circumstances, and what they believe about these actions is important to this volume because global and local meet at the table.

The family is the great instrument for the construction of these complex meanings, even when it does not invent them. Alex McIntosh considers food and the changing roles of the family in Chapter Twelve, “The Family Meal and Its Significance in Global Times.” The change is important and needs emphasis because of the constantly restated myths about the strength of the family in the past. As McIntosh points out, self-conscious emphasis on the family is in itself a relatively modern phenomenon. He thus wants to concentrate on recent history, and he accepts that ours is already a global era. He finds, however, that scholarship on family eating is surprisingly limited and that he must construct a framework for placing the family meal in global history. Reviewing the vast literature on the family, McIntosh notes the variety of functions the family meal serves or is thought to serve, and he considers some of the ways these functions are expressed through gender roles or parental discipline or seating arrangements. The question that follows—what have been the effects, in the family and on society, of the changes in eating patterns that we associate with recent global history?—deserves the
attention from scholars that it receives in popular discourse. Assertions about the impact on family life of packaged food and fast foods, nearly always alleged to be deleterious, are commonplaces of late-twentieth-century commentary. On subjects as sensitive as food and family, the fears of global changes are clearer than the changes themselves.

In fact, of course, the global and the local construct each other, creating something new, as Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney emphasizes in “We Eat Each Other’s Food to Nourish our Body: The Global and the Local as Mutually Constituent Forces,” Chapter Thirteen. After comparing anthropological and historical approaches to global history, she traces Japan’s response over the centuries to three different sets of food practices. All of them—eating rice, meat, and American fast foods—were imported; yet as symbols and metaphors, these food practices express intensely felt conceptions of identity, modernity, and the Other. External influences have been absorbed, changing society by becoming critical constituents of it. Art, poetry, rituals, proclamations, and popular culture have reinforced the association of rice with the land and an ancient past, of meat with modernity, and fast food with a new generation in a global culture. Even so, something of older beliefs and taboos has mingled with new practices. Ohnuki-Tierney’s examples have the richness of anthropological fieldwork; by placing them in the context of a broader literature, she makes her study of Japan a statement about global processes more generally.

The final chapter, “Food and the Counterculture: A Story of Bread and Politics,” treats the current history of one country, the United States; yet Warren Belasco’s lively study is also an essay on, and example of, truly global thinking. It explains the intellectual and cultural origins of a movement that constructed a countercultural conception of globalization. Using the twentieth-century’s increased knowledge of other cultures, the world economy, nutritional needs, the agricultural and biological sciences, and issues of identity—the very kinds of knowledge that led to assertions that mass-produced food, globally distributed were an inevitable necessity—this movement created an alternative vision. While maintaining much of the apocalyptic tone of those it opposes, that movement has, as Belasco shows, deeply American roots. In turn, it has found notable resonance in much of the rest of the developed world, as so much of American culture has. The call for radical change comes not simply as a reaction to global forces but from the sense of liberation that can come from awareness of them. An account of ecological and global connections that stimulate a countercultural movement centered on food and then facilitates new marketing strategies by international corporations, Belasco’s chapter about the choices of some young, middle-class Americans is also about global history on many levels. Written with the wit and insight of a sympathetic participant, it relates to all the other chapters in this book.
IV
The Results

This project on food in global history did not require, it is worth noting, that everyone agree or that all issues be resolved. Global history does not imply a particular methodology or ideology. Globalization remains an imprecise term, its sources, direction, antiquity, and inevitability all subject to dispute. Nevertheless, these authors, experts looking anew at topics they know well, found it useful to relate their analyses to global historical processes. Nor does global history require massive coverage of all human experience but only the establishment of global frameworks within which to set the historical problem to be analyzed. Such frameworks then help determine the theories and data relevant to the problem’s solution. The study of food encourages construction of such frameworks both because there is so much information on which to build and because histories of food touch on so many aspects of social life.

Connecting food to social life while placing that relationship in a global context encourages the use of evidence and methods often kept apart by the habits of academic disciplines. As many of these chapters indicate, the fact that with regard to food some similar issues arise in all societies facilitates unusual comparisons between distant societies and stimulates more systematic comparisons of societies known to be connected. Recognizing foodways as part of large-scale patterns of historical change makes it possible to relate the food practices of one place at one moment to theories about global change.

There are hints in these essays that food itself be made the basis for a periodization of human history, and some of these chapters show to good effect how that might be done. Assessing contemporary change in light of historical turning points can be salutary, and historical understanding is deepened with recognition of food’s importance in the history of civilization. Food was a central factor in the transition of hunters and gatherers to settled agriculture, irrigation, and the domestication of animals; in evolution of new systems of land holding and increased division of labor; in the development and diffusion of agricultural technology; and in the rise of commerce around the world. In such an outline, European settlement of the New World stands out for the wealth of new foods carried to Europe and Asia as well as for the building of empires. A periodization based on foodways would stress the massive migrations that came later and then, especially in the last one hundred years, the improved means of transporting and preserving foods. Such periodizations, which can be worked out in greater detail for single societies or particular foods, are helpful in relating foodways to political and cultural change. Like all efforts to place food in a global, historical context, they usually are more valuable when they lead to fresh thinking about the nature of historical processes than when they attach data on food to conventional con-
exceptions of change or, in laying claim to historical significance, treat food as an independent cause of long-term change. (Whole civilizations can also be categorized in terms of the foods that are their dietary staples, emphasizing the ties to social structure and culture built around wheat, rice, or potatoes. Such efforts, however, tend to be more interesting than explanatory and in fact to rely on conventional historical frameworks).

In many of these chapters, a global historical framework leads to the identification of problems needing fresh analysis, exposing, for example, parochial assumptions that had flourished unchallenged and sometimes unnoticed. This is most evident in accounts of public policy but applies elsewhere as well. By moving beyond the nation, which provides the framework of most historical writing, national and regional practices that seemed simply natural or necessary are often shown to need fuller explanation. In the same way, extending analysis through time exposes hidden assumptions common to contemporary thinking (including many within the social sciences and global history itself). Global history can similarly help overcome the habits of Eurocentricism, although that benefit is by no means automatic.

The history of food invites some generalizations about global history more generally. The rules of material necessity do apply to the production of food and the need for nutrition. There are limits to the possible. Material conditions, which both inhibit and stimulate change, circumscribe history but do not determine it. As these chapters illustrate, rarely do such constraints explain more than the most basic elements of a society’s eating patterns. Foods and cuisines—like technologies, ideas, and fashions—spread beyond the circumstances of their creation to other environments, altering the receiving societies in the process even as they themselves are transformed. Cuisine is never fixed. The meanings of food derive from the way eating intersects with community, and expressions of those meanings matter; for cultures are real, but cultural boundaries are shifting, social creations. Food is a useful marker of difference and cultural purity would be an impoverishment. When the study of food reveals more clearly the interdependence of ecology, property, social structure, international trade, scientific knowledge, public policy, taste, custom, belief, and life style and when that study shows how these interconnections reach around the world, then the history of food has revealed ligatures of global history.

Not surprisingly, historical interest in food turns out to have extraordinary relevance to our own times, illuminating issues of development, international cooperation, multinational corporations, public policy, human health, and social identity, while revealing the tensions between tradition and change within specific cultures. These intense contemporary concerns should open up new avenues of historical research that will in turn affect our understanding of the present. Notably, these issues fall within five areas in which global historical scholarship, empirical and theoretical, is particularly strong: the global restructuring of cultures as the result of mass communications,
increased leisure, and salient issues of identity; the global networks of production that depend on and locally demand particular structures of land holding, labor relations, and systems of production; the global role of state policies in shaping international connections through empire, international agencies, trade policies, tariffs, and regulations that favor certain interests in the name of public welfare or national need; the global systems of distribution that foster global fashions and patterns of consumption; and the global environmental constraints that become more pressing as technology mines resources around the globe. The chapters in this volume touch on all these areas, indicating both the fruitfulness of current scholarship on global history and the contribution to that history that can come from the study of food.

Some conclusions do emerge. Historically, food has tended to become more available, its distribution increasingly a matter of market rationality, and its consumption increasingly self-conscious and codified. Its availability has increased in a double sense. Despite ever-growing populations, a greater quantity of food is accessible to a larger proportion of human beings; and in nearly every market, there is an ever-greater choice of foods. But these chapters point to other trends as well. The variety of local species may be diminished, with important ecological, evolutionary, and social losses. Capitalist distribution makes access to specific foods primarily a matter of means, thinning some of its cultural symbolism. Food becomes a product, produced and even redesigned for markets that advertising has helped create. At the same time, the ethnic and regional identity of food has become increasingly codified, less a matter of local custom or of the foods available at a given moment than of a representation collectively agreed upon: a cuisine defined in a certain way, served in restaurants with a certain decor, usually at set hours to fit urban needs at predictable prices and to the expected customers.

Several chapters deal with the remarkable spread of cuisines that were once identified with a single country. The result of migration, touring, marketing, and wealth, this dissemination of cuisines does not strike our authors as the homogenization so many fear. It may be that the foods consumed with minimal ritual in their homelands (or at least, like tea, easily stripped for export of the rituals that sustained them at home)—hamburger, French fries, pizza, hot dogs—are the ones that travel best. In any case much of the fear about the globalization of eating habits and taste seems misplaced. Food cultures have always intermixed and overflowed political or cultural boundaries, and their symbolic importance makes it easy to exaggerate their cultural effect. Sushi bars on every continent do not replace other cuisines; and if McDonald's hamburgers have found a niche on the Champs Elysées and in Tokyo and Istanbul, their impact on national eating habits has been rather less revolutionary than many feared.37

These chapters also help to correct the presumptions of determinism, driven by technology and markets, that many discussions of global history in-
vite. The contributors here do not find the global and the local to be in mortal combat but see their intersection as part of a continuing process of creativity. They identify the distinctiveness of our era in the range and pace of change but consider any dichotomy between homogeneity and heterogeneity more false than helpful. Cultures, it is clear, give very unreliable testimony as to which behaviors are new or old; and societies are deceptive about the distinctions between the foreign and the indigenous. Several authors show that much considered to be timeless (styles of regional cooking, for example) often has quite recent origins and that much heralded as new (such as the transcontinental spread of foods, pushed by economic interests and pulled by fashion) often has many precedents.

These studies of food in global history demonstrate anew the humbling relevance of the past, connect society to ecology and time, reveal the persistent power of human choice, employ knowledge of nutrition and evidence from history to challenge received opinions in both areas, provide critical assessments of public policies affecting food and health, and explore the continuing concern for cultural identity while revealing some of the contrivances from which identities are constructed. The history of food invites a tolerant relativism by underscoring how much of culture consists of taste and mores combining necessity with convention. Although omnivorous and adaptable, human beings choose to erect taboos and prejudices against certain foods; and the tension between preference for the familiar foods of home and attraction to the luxury of imported variety adds its energy to the process of change. Because something so simple as food is so thoroughly woven into the fabric of social life, foodways provide a remarkable instrument for tracking critical patterns in global history.

Notes

1. Emile Zola's novel, *Le Ventre de Paris*, about the markets of Les Halles is a classic elaboration of these themes.


4. These points are developed in William Alex McIntosh, Sociologies of Food and Nutrition (New York: Plenum, 1996).


7. The work of Mary Douglas has been particularly influential, see her “Deciphering a Meal,” in Myth, Symbol, and Culture, Clifford Geertz, ed. (New York: Norton, 1971). Sidney Mintz, Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History (New York: Viking, 1982), 185.


9. As an example: Sabry Hafez, “Food as a Semiotic Code in Arabic Literature,” Zubaida and Tapper, eds., Culinary Cultures of the Middle East, 257–80; the use of food by individual artists can be revealing, too, as in Maggie Lane, Jane Austen and Food (London: Hambledon Press, 1995).

10. In France, for example, the most noted regional dishes are often based on foods that only arrived from the New World in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Jean-Louis Flandrin and Philip Hyman, “Regional Tastes and Cuisines: Problems, Docu-
ments, and Discourses on Food in Southern France in the 16th and 17th Centuries,” Food and Foodways: Explorations in the History and Culture of Human Nourishment (June, 1986), 1–31. Similarly, the case for an Italian cuisine was made during the Risorgimento in Artusi’s famous cookbook, which borrowed from French models.


14. Bruce Mazlish, Wolf Schäfer, and I have sustained an ongoing debate on this subject for some time. Initial positions can be found in our chapters in Conceptualizing Global History, Bruce Mazlish and Ralph Buultjens, eds. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1933). Schäfer’s sense of global history is more fully developed in his book, Ungleichzeitigkeit als Ideologie (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994). Some of the available theories and ideological differences are discussed in the 1995 special issue of History and Theory.


18. Victor Liberman achieves this in “Transcending East-West Dichotomies: State and Culture Formation in Six Ostensibly Disparate Areas,” Modern Asian Studies, 31 (1997), 463–546. He compares the internal development in the early modern period of selected Asian and European countries, and the parallels he finds are all the more suggestive because they do not start from the search for a connection between the cases (a preoccupation of global history).


