

Book reviews

Changing Food Habits: Case Studies from Africa, South America and Europe. Edited by Carola Lentz. Pp. 288. (Harwood Academic Publishers, Switzerland, 1999.) £32.00, ISBN 9-05702-564-7, hardback.

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This volume is part of a series: 'Food in History and Culture'. The general purpose of this series is 'to examine and illuminate the role of food in various cultures and throughout history in order to provide a greater understanding of civilization and society', as the editors of the series, Carole M. Counihan and Steven L. Kaplan, indicate in an introduction to the series.

The reviewed book consists of eleven chapters and the Editor's introduction, which describes what *is* in the book: '... interesting case studies ... devoted to processes of change in African, South American and European countries' (p. 1). And this is exactly what the reader will find in the book. Most of the studies present original field research, which analyses dietary changes in diverse social and cultural contexts.

The first chapter (G. Spittler) discusses advantages of 'a simple meal' by example of dietary habits of Kel Ewey Tuareg, nomads from Africa. The cross-cultural comparison with European tradition gives evidence that historically the notion 'simple but perfect' existed in Europe too but gradually simple needs became the equivalent of shortage and poverty. A. von Oppen considers in the next chapter the transition of peasants in the Upper Zambezi from millet to a new staple crop, cassava or manioc (*Manihot utilissima*), first introduced by the Portuguese in 16th/17th centuries, with analysis of the economic and social factors stimulating this transition.

The third chapter (K. T. Hansen) discusses changes in food habits in urban Zambia, including gender and class differences in cooking practices. Thus, the cook in a colonial household was always a male, while women prepared food in servants' own houses. In spite of some noticeable changes in domestic service in postcolonial times, men have kept their jobs as professional cooks. The shift from subsistence farming and millet consumption in central Sudan to the market production of sesame and some other crops is described by J. Theis.

The next two chapters discuss food changes in Andean communities. L. Delgado presents the results of a study on Food Aid programmes in Peru. The author explains the reasons for different attitudes of Andean people towards intervention projects and shows their connection with socioeconomic differentiation. M. J. Weismantel has studied patterns of food consumption in the Ecuadorian Andes and shows the change towards the use of some modern foodstuff as a survival strategy.

C. Lentz (Chapter 7) discusses her findings from anthropological research into alcohol consumption. She gives a brief literary review on the subject and compares models of production and consumption of beer in Ecuador and Ghana. In particular, she shows that in north-western Ghana both the production and consumption of beer expanded greatly after the Second World War. On the other hand, in 'Indian villages

in Ecuador the development of beer production went in the opposite direction' (p. 170), due to the commercialization of alcohol consumption.

The remaining chapters deal with food changes in Europe, both in the past and at present. The shift from particular types of grain and to different food preparation techniques in the 19th century is discussed in Chapter 8 (E. Meyer-Renschhausen); the rationing system and food policy during the Second World War in Switzerland is discussed in Chapter 9 (J. Tanner); and the post-war changes in food consumption in West Germany are described in Chapter 10 (M. Wildt). The last chapter (A. Çaglar) deals with food preferences of Turkish immigrants in today's Germany and the successful marketing of the *döner kebab* as a symbol of both tradition and modernity.

Such are, very briefly, the contents and structure of the volume under review. Of course, there are many more countries than those presented in the book that have been, or are now going through drastic changes in food consumption and food habits: contemporary Russia is certainly one of those. But the choice made by the editor looks well-founded and justified. All of the chapters provide a very interesting read, accompanied by equally interesting illustrations, mostly black-and-white photos.

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The First Americans: The Pleistocene Colonization of the New World. Edited by Nina G. Jablonski. Pp. 343. (University of California Press, Berkeley, 2002.) £24.95, ISBN 0-940228-50-5, paperback.

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This is welcome addition to the literature on this subject, providing an excellent introduction to current and historical thinking on the colonization of the Americas, through approachable well-written papers. The general tone, with minor exceptions, is one of tolerance for different viewpoints. As such, this volume moves on from the question of whether Clovis was first to engage in the exploration of different scenarios for the colonization of the Americas. The holistic approach includes contributions on the environmental conditions facing humans in Beringia during the end of the last glacial period and the anthropology of virgin landscape (Elias and Meltzer, respectively). It is an excellent, at times provocative, read, highly recommended to everyone from undergraduates upwards.

The two questions of how people came to the Americas and from where could be linked. Stanford and Bradley assess the potential for seafarers from the Iberian peninsula arriving on the East coast, whilst Erlandson examines the possibility that early colonizers arrived by boat from East Asia. Linguistic support for the latter is provided by Nichols in her reprise of what comparative structural typology can tell us about the languages of the Americas. She identifies two temporally separated waves of immigration along the Pacific Rim, one of which would have been prior to the last glacial maximum and linked to the speech communities deriving from the initial colonization of Melanesia and Australia.

Most chapters though confine themselves within the accepted archaeological dates for the first known occupation. Roosevelt, Douglas and Brown give a timely review

of early dates for human occupation sites, arguing that neither pre-Clovis nor Clovis-first theories for the settlement of the Americas are correct. Instead, concentrating on South American archaeology, they elicit a picture of regional adaptation with diverse foraging strategies being employed in a wide range of habitats. This happens, in their opinion, within a short period from the initial colonization, which is seldom seen in the archaeological record. In a detailed overview of life in Monte Verde during the late Pleistocene Dillehay and Rosen examine one of these post-colonization horizons. They demonstrate the importance of environmental archaeology in its unsurpassed ability to produce a detailed description of complex behaviour patterns in a landscape.

Irrespective of the view one takes on chronology, this volume underlines another, perhaps less well-known, polarization present in studies of the First Americans. This opposition arises in the fields of cranial and dental morphology. Steele and Powell concentrate on the North American fossil record to put the case for early Holocene Americans having a cranial morphology that distinguished them from their contemporary and later Holocene counterparts. This finds a parallel in crown and cusp traits (Sundadonty), that some observers have previously used to hypothetically link early Americans with peoples from the Pacific and Indian Rim countries. Both these concepts are opposed by Turner, who revisits his suite of dental traits that define Sinodonty (present in all living Native Americans), and which suggest a link with populations from North-east Asia. Roosevelt, Douglas and Brown, also feel the need to extend their discussion into these fields, but in their objections there is a tendency to marginalize the arguments (and, in the case of Neves and colleagues, misrepresent them) concerning potential links to peoples of the Indian and Pacific Rims.

This undercurrent of discord merits more detailed discussion in future, as the arguments about the physical evidence are not nearly as clear-cut as these authors imply. The suggestion, by Turner, that cranial morphology has converged through time due to parallel changes in environmental influences, i.e. it has no strong genetic underpinning, certainly needs to be explored. The last chapter deals with mitochondrial DNA, which is a good introduction to the topic by Merriwether, but cannot, at present, reconcile the disparate chronologies implied by archaeology and linguistics. Rather, the evidence from the maternal perspective can be interpreted to support both pre- and post-glacial scenarios. Clearly, there is still a long way to go in understanding just who were the First Americans but this volume clarifies our knowledge and provides different hypotheses for science to evaluate.

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Fluent Bodies: Ayurvedic Remedies for Postcolonial Imbalance. By Jean M. Langford. Pp. 311. (Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2002.) £15.50, ISBN 0-8223-2948-4, paperback.

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Jean Langford takes the reader on an interesting journey to modern India, where Ayurvedic medical practice has been shaped and re-invented by colonial and neocolonial

organization of medical knowledge. Her study shows how Ayurvedic physicians today take part in a wide discourse of biomedical science, national identity and neo-orientalism. Embedded in the historical background of colonialism, Langford reveals how Ayurvedic imitations of European medicine mingled with Indian 'spiritual culture'. In the 1920s this was startling, as is shown in the example of Ayurvedic physicians prescribing quinine for malaria cases in conjunction with Sanskrit poetry (p. 88). Langford also shows how Ayurveda became associated with a Hindu national-cultural essence that needed to be restored to cure the ills of colonialist British and Mogul rule.

The epistemological 'imbalance' of late colonial and postcolonial times is well presented in her ethnographic descriptions of private and institutionalized Ayurvedic practice, also allowing insights into the difficulties of an anthropologist 'seeking complexities in the wrong place' when looking for 'thick descriptions' in 'thin ethnographic situations', the example here being an Ayurvedic college situation where the anthropologist feels turned down by missing classes that have been replaced by 'self-study' (p. 100). The ethnography receives a strong personal touch when describing the author herself protecting Ayurveda as a form of ethnomedicine in a heated argument with an Ayurvedic physician who exposes very different views from her own (p. 43).

The study gains from her self-critical re-assessment of these and other ethnographic situations. Her initial assumptions – that medical phenomena can be mapped onto a person, that local medical knowledge can be isolated and defined, and that illness is a private matter – are undermined by the responses of the Ayurvedic physicians she interviews. Her ethnographies show that a typological comparison cannot easily be achieved in the multi-intentional practice of Ayurveda where medical statements are also political gestures and private and public spheres intermingle beyond Western comprehension.

In Langford's bibliographical sources one misses some good core readings on Ayurveda, like Jolly (1994), Kutumbiah (1999) and Wujastyk (1998), especially in the historical summaries. The exercise of knowledge practice, which Timothy Mitchell coined 'enframing' (1988) and on which Langford bases her analysis, may also not be the 'only' way to understand the relationship between institutional form and content or function (p. 97).

Langford's anthropological terminology of 'Ayurvedic phenomenology', which remains largely undefined, may pose some problems of understanding to readers, but is balanced out by her rich detailed descriptions and well-documented studies of contemporary Ayurveda. *Fluent Bodies* offers a needed counterbalance to popular books on Ayurveda that largely romanticize its history and practice. Langford reveals the realities. A nuanced understanding of contemporary situations includes institutional corruption, the buying of Ayurvedic degree certificates, socioeconomic pressures that push Ayurvedic doctors into prescribing antibiotics, and educational conflicts that have largely contributed to the making of modern institutionalized Ayurveda.

Contemporary Ayurveda is also characterized by the 'construction of foreign bodies' who seek Ayurvedic treatment (often in Indian holiday resorts). Langford shows how a 'new-age' Ayurveda terminology, that would neither be applied to nor understood by Indian patients, has been created by Indian practitioners to treat Westerners and satisfy their cultural and spiritual voids. Thus, the fluidity of bodies

in Ayurveda has been able to remedy colonial wounds as well as fill the voids of the ex-colonialists themselves. The book would make good reading for both sides.

References

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Race, Nature and Culture: An Anthropological Perspective. By Peter Wade. Pp. 150. (Pluto Press, London, 2002.) £13.99, ISBN 0-7453-1454-6, paperback.
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'Within the human species, the concept of race serves no purpose. The structure of human populations is extremely complex and varies from region to region, from people to people; owing to continuous migrations towards the borders of all nations, there are always nuances which render clean separations impossible.' (Luca e Luigi Cavalli-Sforza, 1993, *Chi siamo. La Storia della diversità umana*, p. 344).

Similarly, in 1971, Lévi-Strauss provoked no small scandal when he underlined the fact that the history of race was also the history of the innumerable defeats that this research had suffered (Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1971, *Race et Culture*).

Why then reinvestigate once again the concept of race? Why go over the old ground of a notion that is apparently empty and barren? In an article *Race and Medicine* that recently appeared in *Science* magazine (2003, vol. 302), the medical-pharmacological implications deriving from ethnic-racial differences have been discussed. The question is, can even a meticulous piece of ethnographic research tell us anything new about something that has already been rigorously observed, recorded and investigated? And it is to this question – now more intriguing and provocative than ever – that Peter Wade attempts to respond with his text *Race, Nature and Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*. The book is divided into six chapters: the first three investigate theoretical issues. The author, after having searched for a 'modern' definition of the notion of race, agrees upon a malleable concept, one which is 'adaptable' and 'flexible'. Wade refers in particular to Goldberg's 1933 definition: 'race is not a static concept with a single sedimented meaning. Its power has consisted in its adaptive capacity to define population groups and by extension, social agents as self and other at various historical moments' p. 7.

Already in the first chapter the interdisciplinary approach on which the entire book is based is clear: history, the history of science, cultural studies, biology and medical anthropology – none of these disciplines can be neglected in the contemporary study of race. But Wade is particularly interested in history, especially

colonial history, cultural-historical studies, gender studies and the philosophy of science. According to Wade, who in a 1993 article in *Man* had already employed this methodological approach, social sciences have not yet finished bringing about an exhaustive and profound criticism of the notion of race.

Using an essentially *cultural construction*, social sciences have treated the phenotypical variations as a 'simply natural' element – neutral and unstructured – the use of which permits one to distinguish between racial and other classifications (ethnic, for example); the social sciences, anthropology in particular, have not, in Wade's view, considered that these very phenotypical variations might be socially constructed. Wade in fact questions: 'What constituted "physical variation" for different peoples at different times and in different places?' p. 13. Taking this as his fruitful starting point, in the second chapter Wade scrutinizes this interesting connections between race, gender, class and national identity (see for instance his considerations regarding colonial politics and questions pertaining to race, gender and sexuality). In the third chapter he makes an historical overview on the concept of race (from Plato to Aristotle, from David Hume, Adam Ferguson, to Comte de Buffon and Gottfried Herder and, to finish, Robert Knox and George W. Stocking). The discussions intertwine, the disciplines and approaches weave together, and there are two themes that link the three remaining chapters: body and identity. It is upon these two notions, which nowadays are intensely deconstructed and analysed, that the author outlines his own criticism on the notion of race. Race and identity become, in Wade's perspective, two principles which are mutually stimulating; race appears as a metabolic process in transformation: like identity it is something that is 'fictive' (from the Latin definition of *figere*, to mould): something artificial, manipulated and *constructed*.

But such representations as they are inscribed on the human body, in their materiality and symbolic value, reveal a fixed vividness which still permeates the notion of race, its power and indelible force, its permanence and fixedness. Under this perspective a double level of analysis runs through all of the final chapters: on the one hand a meticulous, precise and detailed study on the conceptualization of a slippery and evasive notion; on the other hand the ethnographic experience and the analysis of the common opinion which reveals how difficult is to eliminate strong prejudices. For this reason the ethnographic experience of the author (see also his monograph, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, 1997) is a very precious one: in particular his considerations on blood, which becomes a powerful metaphor to understand how the notion of race still rests upon prejudices related to purity and impurity, which are 'cliché'-embedded on nature/culture, genetics and biology.

Finally one must ask whether such a meticulous historical analysis can really reduce the asynchrony, the difference that exists today between the conceptual elaboration and the common feeling, or whether Wade's investigation, although very deep and sound, does not tend merely to re-propose these strongly resilient dichotomies. Maybe the ethnographical analysis helps us to understand exactly how much, for the social sciences, race is a theme that requires a great deal of further research and deconstruction with an awareness that this task can be achieved only through an interdisciplinary study.

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