

# 11. Culinary Encounters: Food, Identity, and Colonialism

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*Abstract:* Contemporary foodways and identities are in large measure the product of a long history of colonial encounters. Reciprocally, food has been a consistently prominent material medium for the enactment of colonialism. The intimate links between food practices and the embodiment of identity and between commensality and politics have made food a central arena for the working out of colonial struggles of various kinds. Hence, a focus on food holds great analytical promise for archaeologists attempting to understand ancient colonial situations and their transformative effects on identity. To this end, this chapter attempts to provide a broader theoretical context by pursuing a set of fundamental questions: why and how do people sometimes change their food habits in situations of colonial contact—in particular, why and how do they adopt alien foods and food practices? And when they do, what consequences does this entail and what implications does it have for understanding colonialism?

Interjecting colonialism into the archaeological exploration of the relationship between food and identity is a crucial analytical move. I say this because, in the first place, colonialism has been a pervasive force in world history for at least the past five millennia and one with an obviously marked influence on the formation and transformation of identity. Second, the intimate links between food practices and the embodiment of identity and between commensality and politics make the domain of food an important arena for the working out of colonial struggles over the colonization of consciousness and strategies of appropriation and resistance. Indeed, it is reasonable to assert both that contemporary foodways and iden-

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tities around the world are in large measure the product of a long history of colonial encounters and that, reciprocally, food has been a consistently prominent material medium for the enactment of colonialism. Hence, a focus on food holds great analytical promise for archaeologists in their attempts to penetrate and understand ancient colonial situations and their transformative effects on identity. However, while full of promise, this relationship is by no means simple or straightforward, and progressing beyond banal generalizations to the generation of useful interpretive insights requires both methodological ingenuity and a rigorous attention to the contextualization of food issues within a broader theoretical framework.

My own long-standing interest in this theme grew out of both archaeological research in Mediterranean France on the ancient colonial encounter between the native Iron Age peoples of the region and Greek, Etruscan, and Roman colonists and ethnographic research among the Luo people in East Africa (in collaboration with Ingrid Herbich) that necessitated an engagement with the history of their encounter with British colonialism. In both of these cases, it quickly became apparent that food was centrally important to the articulation of indigenous and colonial societies and the construction of identity and that understanding the role of food in these situations was crucial to understanding the operation of colonialism—and vice versa. However, although episodic reference will be made to them, my goal in this chapter is not to examine these particular studies in detail but rather to offer some productive and provocative reflections on the broader theoretical issue of the relationship among food, identity, and colonialism. Obviously, this is a subject far too vast and complex to be addressed comprehensively in a brief essay. Hence, my comments in this chapter are intended to be more in the way of selective suggestions pointing out some promising paths that merit exploration.

## Food and Colonialism

Before embarking on that discussion, let me lay the groundwork by first elaborating a little on several of the assertions I have just made and offering a few definitions of the concepts being employed here. In the first place, let me make clear that I use the word *food* in the broad sense to also include things like alcoholic beverages. The latter are, after all, simply special forms of food with psychoactive properties resulting from alternative techniques of culinary treatment (Dietler 1990a, 2006a): the same grain can become porridge, bread, beer, or whisky, depending simply upon the techniques applied to it. Ethnographic studies indicate that in some societies people receive substantial nutrition and as much as a third of their caloric intake in the form of beer (Platt 1955, 1964; Steinkraus 1995). Moreover, as much as 15 to 30 percent of the family grain supply is commonly dedicated to the production of alcoholic beverages in agrarian societies (de Garine 1996; Dietler 2001; Jennings 2005; Platt 1964). Given these facts, and other considerations that I have discussed at length elsewhere (see Dietler 1990a, 2001, 2006a), it would seem logically untenable to exclude alcohol from a consideration of food simply because beverages containing ethanol have been constructed as a “drug” in Western discourse under the influence of the nineteenth-century temperance movement.

And then there is the problematic term *colonialism*. As with *culture*, *colonialism* has become one of those ubiquitous concepts in the social sciences and humanities about which there is general consensus regarding its importance yet little agreement about its precise definition. Without engaging in a lengthy semantic discussion (see Dietler 2005a, 2006b), let me at least be clear here about my own use of the term *colonialism*, by which I mean the projects and practices of control deployed in interactions between societies linked in asymmetrical relations of power and the processes of social and cultural transformation resulting from those practices. Hence, I do not view colonialism as a reified transhistorical phenomenon or a uniform process explicable within a single “theory of colonialism.” Rather, I am deeply skeptical that such a reductive venture is possible (see also Ahmad 1992; Comaroff 1997; Cooper 2005; Dirks 1992; Slemon 1990; Thomas 1994)—which is decidedly not to say that colonialism is not a useful concept or focus of analysis. Quite the contrary. *Colonialism*, in the sense that I use the term, is a pragmatically general (and inherently plural) rubric employed to facilitate the comparative analysis of a wide range of practices and strategies by which peoples try to make subjects of other peoples in a variety of disparate historical situations in the effort to better understand both the differences and the similarities in these processes through history.

Why is the comparative study of colonialism a useful endeavor? I would suggest that the significance of the kinds of practices clustered under the label of colonialism can hardly be doubted, given that by the early decades of the twentieth century, one-half of the surface of the earth’s continents was under some form of colonial domination and about two-fifths of the population of the world (more than 600 million people) were living under colonial rule (Girault 1921; Osterhammel 1997:25). Moreover, other regions (such as Latin America) had suffered long periods of transformative colonial domination in previous centuries before finally ridding themselves of European control during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Following the rapid collapse of all the European empires in the face of indigenous resistance during the middle decades of the twentieth century, the term *postcolonial* has become a popular label for the contemporary world situation. However, understanding the current state of affairs, including the various emergent forms of cultural and economic “neo-colonialism” and globalization, is simply not possible without reference to the history and persisting effects and forms of colonialism. Indeed, this is precisely the gist of the field of postcolonial studies and of a good deal of cultural anthropology over the past couple of decades.

This colonial legacy, of course, extends much deeper than these most recent Euro-American manifestations of the past few hundred years. In fact, one could reasonably make the case that the past 5,000 years of human history have witnessed an incessant series of colonial encounters that have had a significant global influence on the continual restructuring of culture, society, and identity. And it is reasonable to argue that understanding the present in any particular context requires a comparative exploration of the broad range of strategies and practices employed in the effort to exert control over other societies around the world and throughout history and the varied and complex repercussions of those practices. Indeed, one could argue that, properly undertaken, this comparative strategy is a necessary step in “provincializing Europe,” in the phrase of Chakrabarty (2000): it can serve to rela-

tivize modern European colonialism and dislodge it from the nearly monopolistic role that it has come to occupy in the generation of colonial theory.

Archaeology can contribute to this project in several ways. In the first place, it can aid understanding of the history of the expansion of the Euro-American capitalist "world-system" that, from the sixteenth century on, has been responsible for the most extensive and pervasive implementation of colonialism in world history (Braudel 1992; Ferro 1997; Wallerstein 1974; Wolf 1982). It can do this by furnishing kinds of evidence that are qualitatively different from and independent of the colonial texts that constitute the vast bulk of evidence available to historians. Because most colonial powers were literate and many subjects of colonial domination were not (at least originally), the textual evidence for such encounters tends to be highly partial, in both senses of the term.

What archaeology offers is access to the *material dimension* of the encounter and to the processes of daily life through which the colonial situation was experienced and worked out by ordinary people. For reasons I will examine later, food happens to be both one of the most important of these material dimensions *and* one with excellent potential for archaeological visibility. However, by no means does this provide simple or unmediated access to an indigenous experience of the colonial situation: archaeology is an interpretive practice that has many serious problems with data and epistemology that limit the range and quality of the information we can generate. But archaeology does offer at least a potential means of interrogating the material record of the lives of those whose voices have not been recorded.

Of course, one must be careful not to make a facile virtue out of archaeological necessity by adopting the extreme tactic of fetishizing material culture in such a way that relations between people become mystified as relations between objects and people. To do so, as will be shown later, amounts to swallowing one of colonialism's frequent ideological conceits and attempting to understand colonialism through its own discursive products. Gosden (2004:3, 4), for example, falls prey to this trap by actually defining colonialism as "a particular grip that material culture gets on the bodies and minds of people" and claiming that "colonialism is crucially a relationship with material culture," thereby displacing agency, obscuring important relations of power between people, and ultimately hindering understanding of the more subtle and complex role that material culture plays in colonial processes. Nevertheless, without succumbing to such a seductively reductive position, it is crucial to recognize the profound significance of material culture in the working out of colonial strategies and processes. Fortunately, a new appreciation of this fact has been growing recently in cultural anthropology, history, and postcolonial studies, and this promises new possibilities for fruitful synergistic collaboration with archaeologists in the investigation of colonial history (e.g., see Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Howes 1996; Thomas 1991; Turgeon 1998; Turgeon et al. 1996).

An equally crucial contribution of archaeology to the study of colonialism derives from the fact that it is the primary conduit to ancient, precapitalist colonial encounters, for which relevant contemporary texts are even more limited or completely absent. And, as noted above, it is especially necessary to examine comparatively the many colonial situations that predate Euro-American capitalist expansion in order to ascertain both the singular and more widely shared

features of this recent colonial process that has generated most of our anthropological theory on colonialism—that is, to “provincialize” the modern European experience and its hegemonic role in the production of theory (Chakrabarty 2000; Cooper 2005; Dietler 2005a).

## Food and Identity

Having briefly made the case for the importance of an archaeology of colonialism, let me now turn to the significance of food and the links between food and colonialism. And let me begin by stating something that should be obvious but that bears repetition nonetheless. Although the consumption of food is essential for maintaining human life, that consumption is never simply taking on fuel. People do not ingest calories or protein: rather, they eat *food*, a form of material culture subject to almost unlimited possibilities for variation in terms of ingredients, techniques of preparation, patterns of association and exclusion, modes of serving and consumption, aesthetic evaluations, and so forth. Moreover, food is what may be called “embodied material culture”: that is, a special kind of material culture created specifically for immediate destruction, but destruction through the transformative process of ingestion into the human body (Dietler 2001). Hence, it has an unusually close relationship to the person and to both the inculcation and the symbolization of concepts of identity. Indeed, although I am usually wary of psychoanalytical explanations, the sociologist Pasi Falk (in a book that I find otherwise highly problematic for a number of reasons) has made an interesting observation on the ontogenic significance of food that is worth considering. He noted that the infant’s first perception of difference—of the boundary between subject and object that defines the self—is experienced through the mouth at the mother’s breast long before the development of sight. Hence, according to Falk, the mouth acts as both the model for all subsequent sensory reception and as the gateway regulating the incorporation of alien matter into the body through the culturally coded sense of taste (Falk 1994). Moreover, given that eating is a social act that must be repeated virtually every day for biological survival, it occupies a salient place among the various routinized practices that, as Bourdieu (1990) has explored at length, serve to inculcate habitus—that is, the set of embodied dispositions that structure action in the world and that unconsciously instantiate perceptions of identity and difference.

All of this goes to emphasize why food both is so intimately connected to the formation and expression of identity and is such a versatile and highly charged symbolic medium. However, it should also serve to underline an important caveat: food is not only a sign system and its consumption is not only the consumption of signs. Eating is also a material construction of the self in much more than a metaphorical sense. Hence, it must be acknowledged that an exclusive focus on consumption, particularly the vision of consumption exemplified in some of the more semiotically oriented forms of analysis stemming from the early work of Baudrillard (e.g., 1996), may risk decoupling food from those more traditional, but still crucial, domains of analysis: production and exchange. This would

be particularly dangerous in a colonial context, in which the issue of exploitation and the political context of the articulation of production and consumption should be ever-present concerns.

It is certainly true that, in many ways, consumption is analytically prior to production (although temporally posterior). One need only recall Sahlins's statement that "the exploitation of the American environment, the mode of relation to the landscape, depends upon the model of a meal that includes a central meat element with the peripheral support of carbohydrates and vegetables" (Sahlins 1976:171). As he pointed out, the entire structure of agricultural production and articulation to world markets would change dramatically if Americans ate dogs or horses, both of which are entirely edible. It is the cultural construction of proper consumption, with its symbolic taboos and valuations, that determines production, not vice versa. Hence, focusing on consumption is clearly crucial for comprehending the social and cultural significance of food and its role in colonialism. Moreover, given the focus on identity of this volume, my remarks will certainly be concentrated in the domain of consumption. But what I am cautioning against is an *abstract* treatment of consumption as the circulation of pure signs that is divorced from consideration of the relations of power in which they are embedded or that ignores the crucial materiality of the food being consumed. My goal is, rather, to integrate the exploration of consumption within an analysis of power—and this is one of the reasons for my insistence on inserting colonialism into the discussion of food and identity.

Hence, let us acknowledge that food is a basic and continual human physiological need that is also a form of highly condensed social fact embodying relations of production and exchange and linking the domestic and political economies in a highly personalized way. Moreover, although eating and drinking are among the few biologically essential acts, they are never simply biological acts. Rather, they are learned, culturally patterned techniques of bodily comportment (in the sense of Mauss 1936) that are expressive in a fundamental way of identity and difference.

At this point, it becomes necessary to pose a few basic questions that will structure the rest of my reflections here. In the first place, given the close links between food and identity, why do people sometimes change their food habits in situations of colonial contact—in particular, why do they adopt alien foods and food practices? And when they do, what consequences does this entail and what implications does it have for understanding colonialism?

### **Cross-Cultural Consumption and the Indigenization of Exotic Foods**

It is often said that foodways are among the most conservative and persistent aspects of culture. Like most truisms, this turns out to be not entirely true but not entirely false either. Examples of the avid adoption of exotic foods are legion and most cuisines of the world involve many nonindigenous ingredients. Often alien foods become "indigenized" to the point that they come to be considered a fundamental marker of *local* ethnic cuisine. The tomato in Italian

cooking, maize polenta in north Italian cuisine, tea in England, the potato in Ireland, the sweet potato in Highland New Guinea, maize and cassava among the Luo in Kenya—all of these are examples of thoroughly indigenized foods with exotic origins. Not coincidentally, most of them are also products of colonial encounters as well as examples demonstrating that borrowings flow in both directions in these situations. But if foodways are so stable, and food is so closely tied to identity, then how is this possible?

In part, it can be explained by the fact that what we may, for convenience, call “ethnic” cuisine is more than simply a matter of food *ingredients*. It is true that some specific individual food items do *sometimes* become marked as salient symbols of identity. The Luo, for example, distinguish themselves from the neighboring Luyia by the fact that the Luyia eat caterpillars, which the Luo find disgusting, while the Luo consider termites a great delicacy.<sup>1</sup> Similarly the Luo love fish, which the neighboring Kisii abhor. Likewise, Americans have their hamburgers and apple pie, Bavarians their bratwurst, Scots their haggis, Catalans their paella, and so forth. However, as Mary Douglas has shown, single items do not make an ethnic diet. What is distinctive is “the patterning of a whole cycle of combinations” (Douglas 1984:28)—in other words, a series of menus and the rhythms that structure their consumption or what is sometimes called “meal formats.”

It is this feature that allows the incorporation of alien foods into a routinized set of practices without altering the perception of continuity. For example, among the Luo, the central dish of any main meal—indeed what defines a main meal—is a polenta-like starch called *kuon*. Different kinds of meat, vegetable, or fish dishes serve essentially as a relish for *kuon*. In the precolonial era, *kuon* was made from sorghum. But, following the incorporation of the Luo into the British empire at the end of the nineteenth century, maize was introduced and it became acceptable to substitute maize for sorghum in part or in whole. What is essential for a Luo meal is that *kuon* be present, whatever it is made from. And, whatever else is consumed, unless there is *kuon*, a Luo will say he or she has not eaten.

In fact, this persistence of identity and cultural integrity in the face of experimentation and incorporation of alien foods should not be surprising. It only becomes a problem if we have an unrealistically static conception of culture as a bundle of traits or an isolated organic whole. Rather than viewing culture as simply an inheritance from the past, it is important to recognize that it is also a kind of eternal project (Hountondji 1994; Sahlin 1999). In other words, culture is not a fixed, static system of shared rules and traits but rather sets of embodied categorical perceptions, analogical understandings, aesthetic dispositions, and values that structure ways of reasoning, solving problems, and acting upon opportunities. The operation of culture is always a creative process of structured improvisation. Among those problems/opportunities to be resolved is the ever-present one of dealing with exogenous peoples and objects. This process involves both the selective domestication (or “indigenization”) of formerly foreign goods, practices, and tastes and the rejection of others. Such selective incorporation operates according to a specific cultural logic, but it also has a continual transformative effect in the reproduction of culture. Moreover, this process, obviously, does not occur through the actions of cultures (seen as some sort of reified sentient entities) coming into contact but rather through

the often contradictory actions of individual human beings and social groups located differentially within complex relational fields of power and interest.

This process of selective appropriation and indigenization is not something that is unique to colonial situations. It happens everywhere and continuously, given that societies have never existed in a state of isolation and people must always negotiate their lives in relation to external conditions. Following Ricoeur's (1992) observation that "selfhood" is constructed in a permanent relation with alterity, this is what Jean-Loup Amselle (1998:x) means in talking about "originary syncretism." Cultures are inherently relational in nature: they have always been both products of *creolization* and in a ceaseless process of construction through *creolization*. The distinctive feature of colonial contexts is that the particular configurations of colonial relations of power have a marked influence on the nature and structure of the process. Moreover, as will be discussed later, precisely because of the significance of consumption to the construction of culture, material culture, and food in particular, has repeatedly been implicated in the operation of colonialism.

Perceiving culture in this way means deconstructing the entrenched Western dichotomy between tradition and change (and the linked dichotomy between static and dynamic societies). It also means understanding that the adoption of foreign goods and practices, including food, does not render cultures inauthentic or incoherent. As Sahlins (1999:xi) has noted, "Anthropologists have known at least since the work of Boas and his students that cultures are generally foreign in origin and local in pattern." Moreover, cultural continuity usually consists of the distinctive ways that cultures change (Sahlins 1993:2). Which brings us back to the issue of consumption and the cross-cultural adoption of foods.

Not only is consumption structured by cultural categories and dispositions, but as Jean Comaroff (1996:20) has noted, "culture is constructed through consumption." This process of cultural construction through consumption implies two things. In the first place, objects "materialize" cultural order—they render abstract cultural categories visible and durable, they aid the negotiation of social interaction in various ways, and they structure perception of the social world. The "systems of objects" (Baudrillard 1996) that people construct through consumption serve both to inculcate personal identity and to enable people to locate others within social fields through the perception of embodied tastes and various indexical forms of symbolic capital. But more than simply reproducing static systems of cultural categories, consumption, secondly, constructs culture in a more dynamic sense—and this is especially relevant to the issue of cross-cultural consumption and colonialism. In effect, consumption is a process of structured improvisation that continually materializes cultural order by also dealing with alien objects and practices through either transformative appropriation and assimilation or rejection. Hence, cross-cultural consumption is a continual process of selective appropriation and creative assimilation according to local logics that is also a way of continually (re)constructing culture.

This is not to say that such consumption does not have significant unintended consequences in terms of altering the conditions of cultural reproduction. It certainly does. Indeed, focusing upon the relationship of food and colonialism is intended to underline precisely this feature. But these effects are often subtle and



gradual, and they frequently will not be perceived by the participants as marking a cultural discontinuity (although there will sometimes be generational or gender differences in such perceptions).

Three major questions emerge from this discussion for the archaeologist interested in food, identity, and colonialism. First, why and how do some specific alien foods and food practices get appropriated in colonial contexts while others are ignored, rejected, or turned into points of contestation or symbols of difference? Second, what are the often unintended consequences of such cross-cultural borrowings in terms of identity, politics, and social relations? Third, how can archaeologists approach these issues in the material record of the past and use them to understand colonialism? As I noted earlier, there are no simple a priori rules that will enable us to predict these things universally. However, an improved theoretical grounding of the questions will allow the better formulation of interpretive arguments and assessment of plausibility.

### **Why Are Alien Foods Desired?**

First to the “why” question. In this context, it is important to remember that such transfers do not occur through the action of cultures or other abstract entities but rather through the often contradictory actions of individual human beings and social groups located differentially within complex relational fields of power and interest. Similarly, identity is not something that resides solely, or even primarily, at the level of ethnic groups, nations, or other large-scale imagined communities. It is lodged in intersecting networks of kinship affiliations, social categories, class and status group memberships, and other such things that may be situationally relevant. And the process of cross-cultural appropriation of foods usually has much more to do with relations at these levels than it does with broader “ethnic” consciousness. For example, class dynamics and the creation of internal distinctions and boundaries often lie behind such adoptions, with items potentially becoming a salient marker of ethnicity only much later. This can be in the form of what Appadurai (1986) called an elite “turnstile effect,” with an upper class continually adopting exotic foods that must be shifted as the process of emulation by lower classes reduces their diacritical symbolic value. However, as the history of the spread of tobacco in Europe shows, goods and practices can be introduced through either lower or upper classes and trickle up or down the social hierarchy (van Gernet 1995).

Demand for alien foods is a product of the variable interplay of embodied categories and tastes, strategic decisions about the potential deployment of foods in particular social roles, creative analogical interpretations of new instrumental or social uses, semiotic understandings about the relationships among foods in “systems of objects” (in the sense of Baudrillard 1996), and other such factors. It is important to reiterate that demand is not a uniform property or product of cultures. It is socially situated and constructed; that is, although it clearly follows a specific cultural logic, it varies among classes and categories of people as a result of the interplay of the factors noted above in the internal improvisational politics of social life. This is clear in, for example, Bourdieu’s (1984) analysis of the differential distribution of

tastes and cultural capital across social fields within late twentieth-century French society, but it is equally crucial to remember in analyzing small-scale precapitalist societies. Demand for foreign goods and practices may vary according to social position or category, and the differences may be generated largely by the relational dynamics among social groups or fields. Obviously, in archaeological contexts we will usually not be able to discern the relative operation of all these factors in great detail. But we can distinguish demand as a selective force structuring consumption within a specific world of options and attempt to discern as completely as possible the logic of patterns of choices made (Dietler 1998, 2006b).

### How Are Alien Foods Indigenized?

Given some partial indications of *why* exotic foods may be appropriated, it is also important to ask *how* this happens—that is, precisely what are the practices and contexts that are responsible for not simply introducing an innovation but also producing the social validation that is necessary to make it more generally accepted? In this vein, it becomes important to make a distinction in the analysis of foodways between the routinized practices of daily consumption that we may call meals and the more self-consciously performative rituals of consumption that are called feasts. Both of these exist in a complex semiotic relationship to each other and form part of a common semiotic field that gives them both meaning (see Dietler 2001; Douglas 1984; Elias 1978). The ways in which feasts are symbolically marked as ritual performances (e.g., through temporal eccentricity, spatial or architectonic framing, the use of unusual kinds or quantities of foods, the use of special service vessels, theatrical devices, and so on) will depend upon a relationship to patterns and practices of mundane daily meals. But what is important to emphasize here is that, in addition to the various political roles that feasts serve (see Dietler 2001; Hayden 2001), they are also prime arenas for the construction and transformation of values and the validation of exotic novelties. And this is especially true of new foods. Polly Wiessner (2001) has provided an exemplary analysis of this phenomenon in New Guinea, where local “big men” used feasts to promote their interests by introducing and valorizing new kinds of foods (such as pigs) and objects. Foods and consumption practices introduced and validated in this way can then be transferred to daily meals and eventually become indigenized standard practices. Other avenues for introduction may come in the opposite direction through, for example, the common colonial practice of intermarriage and the gradual insertion of exotic foods into daily meal formats.

### The Consequences of Borrowing

This discussion inevitably leads us to consider the subject of the significance of material culture, and of food in particular, in strategies of colonialism, something that has gained increasing recognition among anthropologists and historians in recent years. Given the importance of consumption in constructing

social relationships, it should not be surprising that goods, including especially food, have not only been appropriated and indigenized, but they have also been used by both parties in colonial situations to attempt to control the other—"making subjects by means of objects" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997:218). This involves not only attempts to create novel desires for new goods but also attempts to get people to use imported objects in particular ways, as well as the (usually mistaken) belief that the use of particular goods or technologies will inherently induce certain kinds of desired behavior.

For example, it is clear that clothing played a very important instrumental role in the strategies of European missionaries to "colonize the consciousness" of indigenous peoples in various parts of the world and instill new concepts of work discipline, temporality, and gender relations. Among the Tswana in South Africa, both clothing and architecture served as vehicles for attempts by missionaries to inculcate European concepts of domesticity and bodily discipline, and they became sites of struggle as the Tswana used these new material forms as an expressive language to structure identity in new ways and contest colonial categories and aesthetics (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997). As this case suggests, such strategies to use material objects as vectors of control always have unintended consequences for all the parties concerned.

This has been equally true of food. For example, the Luo recount tales of, as they put it, "being chased with tea." This is a reference to attempts by colonial missionaries to instill concepts of English bourgeois domesticity and sobriety by getting the Luo to substitute tea for beer as a social lubricant. The Luo now drink tea only rarely, but Luo *women* consider it the appropriate drink for receiving certain kinds of visitors in the home, and it is usually served with slices of white bread, another alien delicacy that is not otherwise consumed. Tea also requires the purchase of refined sugar (something that the Luo do not use for anything else) and the use of fresh milk (another unique usage, as they generally prefer soured milk). Hence, contrary to the desires of the missionaries, tea has certainly not replaced beer. It is not used in rituals or in male commensality. Nor has it had much impact on Luo domestic habits. What it has done is help to tie women to the national cash economy by creating a periodic need for the purchase of a set of ingredients (tea leaves, sugar, bread) and specialized objects (a teapot and cups) of nonlocal origin.

Smoking tobacco was an alien practice that was not encouraged by the missionaries but that had much greater success. However, it resulted in a gender-marking pattern of consumption in which women smoke cigarettes using an unusual technique in which they hold the burning end inside the mouth, while men smoke with the burning end out. Both men and women also smoke clay pipes, an alien form that was introduced into the repertoire of potters but that is largely giving way to cigarettes. While smoking is now a thoroughly indigenized consumption practice, government attempts to get the Luo to raise tobacco as a cash crop have been more ambivalent. The Luo consider money gained from the sale of tobacco to be "bitter money," a substance that is dangerous to use in transactions that are socially important, such as bridewealth or cattle purchases (Shipton 1989).

As these cases underline, it is important to recognize that (despite the beliefs and desires of many agents of colonialism) when an object crosses cultural fron-

tiers, it rarely arrives with the same meanings and practices associated with it in its context of origin. To use one of the most prominent contemporary examples, Coca-Cola, a bottle of this beverage consumed in rural East Africa does not have the same meaning as an identical one consumed in Chicago. In Chicago it is a fairly banal and ubiquitous drink enjoyed on a quotidian basis, especially by the young, and it is often associated with fast-food consumption. However, in the countryside of western Kenya among the Luo people, Coca-Cola was a prized luxury drink. When consumed, it usually was reserved for serving to distinguished visitors and sometimes incorporated into ceremonial commensality (in a pattern reminiscent of the use of imported French wine in bourgeois homes in Chicago, where it would be unthinkable to use Coca-Cola in a similar way). Hence, the presence of bottles of Coca-Cola in rural Kenya is not a sign of the “Americanization” of Africa but rather of the “Africanization” of Coca-Cola (Dietler 2002). Moreover, it would be wrong to assume that one could measure a purported process, or relative degree, of “Americanization/acculturation” by simply counting the quantity of Coca-Cola bottles consumed in an area (as has been done frequently by archaeologists, for example, with Greek ceramics on indigenous sites in Iron Age France). Rather, it is crucial to understand the specific contexts of consumption in order to recognize the meaning and significance of such imported foods. After all, it is reported that in Russia Coca-Cola is employed to remove wrinkles, in Haiti it is believed to revive the dead, and in Barbados it is said to transform copper into silver (Howes 1996:6; Pendergrast 1993:245–247). Moreover, Coca-Cola is sometimes valued precisely for its foreign origin (indeed, sometimes for its indexical relationship to an imagined concept of America), while in other contexts it has come to be seen as a thoroughly local drink without any aura of the exotic—as Daniel Miller has reported in Trinidad (Miller 1998).

In using this Coca-Cola example and speaking about the “Africanization” of its consumption, let me make very clear that I am not implying that the consumption of Coca-Cola in Africa is a benign activity without potentially serious economic and cultural consequences. It is evident, for example, that in certain contexts imported soft drinks can come to replace native beverages and this can have implications for both nutrition and relations of economic dependency (James 1993). I am also in no way denying that the availability of Coca-Cola in Africa is driven by strategies of corporate executives seeking global market penetration and enabled by a massive international infrastructure of production and distribution. Nor am I naively advocating a romanticized vision of indigenous agency in which consumption becomes an autonomous form of liberating resistance. There are always both intended and unintended consequences in consuming alien goods and these consequences ought precisely to be the focus of analysis in understanding the entangling operation of consumption and the subtle transformation of consciousness and identity. But this is not a simple homogeneous, or homogenizing, process of the “cocacolonization” of passive peripheral subjects. Whatever the hegemonic schemes of Coca-Cola executives for global market domination, demand for this beverage in western Kenya or Chicago is a product of local desires and tastes generated according to local cultural conceptions and social practices. In order to be desired and used, exotic foods must al-

ways be imbued with culturally relevant meaning locally and incorporated into local social relationships. And these processes of redefinition and reorientation must be contextualized and understood if we are to comprehend the transformative effects of the cross-cultural incorporation of foods.

This leads to a further point that needs to be emphasized at this stage: not only is the consumption of foreign goods an inadequate measure of a purported process (or degree) of what, under an outdated paradigm, used to be called the “acculturation” of a society, but also, paradoxically, imported objects or practices may even become salient symbolic markers of the boundaries of identity between consumers and the society of origin.

This can be true even in the case of the adoption of what Appadurai (1996:90) distinguishes as “hard cultural forms” that “come with a set of links between value, meaning, and embodied practice that are difficult to break and hard to transform.” The “indigenization” of the English game of cricket in India (Appadurai 1996) and the adoption of American baseball in Japan (Kelly 1997) are classic examples. In both cases, these rituals are performed with the same implements and costumes under the same rules in constructed spaces of the same form. Yet, because of such things as the spirit motivating play, the behavior expected of players, and the social origin and position of the players, the games have come to be seen to be profoundly different in each cultural context. Hence, these shared rituals become privileged sites for the revelation and reification of identity and cultural boundaries and potential arenas for the contestation of values. To cite an archaeological example involving food from my own area of interest in the ancient Mediterranean, one can point to the Greek symposium, a wine-drinking ritual that was adopted by both the Etruscans and the Romans. However, disapproving Greek references to the presence of wives at Etruscan symposia, a practice unthinkable to the Greeks, should alert us to the nature of the differentiation being evoked through this practice adopted and adapted by the Etruscans. For Greeks, the symposium was a male affair at which the only women present would be what may euphemistically be called “specialists” in the entertainment of the men—one would never find proper women attending. Cicero offers evidence of a similar kind of revelatory dissonance in recounting an episode in which Romans joining a symposium in the house of a Greek suggested that the host’s daughter join them, provoking a brawl during which one of the Romans was killed (Cicero *Verr.* 2.1.26.66; see Dunbabin 1998).

As these various examples have suggested, the consequences of the appropriation and assimilation of foods and food practices in colonial situations are difficult to predict, but the unintended consequences are often quite profound. This can be especially true when such appropriation produces an increasing entanglement of societies in a broader colonial political economy. For example, in the case of English consumption of the alien Asian beverage of tea that has come to be regarded as a quintessentially English practice, Marshall Sahlins (1994) has shown how increasing demand for tea forced English merchants to trade with the Hawaiian kings to acquire sandalwood, the one commodity that the Chinese would accept for their tea leaves—which led to the complete destruction of all the sandalwood on the Hawaiian islands and eventually to the opium trade as the English sought

desperately to find another product desired by the Chinese to ensure their supply of tea. Similarly, Sidney Mintz (1985) has shown how the escalating demand for sugar among the British working class was intimately connected with the establishment of sugar plantations in the Americas and the growth of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to supply the plantations. Global colonial relations can also have tertiary effects on the adoption of foods: for example, the introductions both of the potato in Ireland and of maize in Kenya were the result of parallel English colonial ventures in the New World and in Ireland and Africa.

Perhaps an even more compelling demonstration of the importance of food in the colonial political economy and the complexities of both the relationship between intentions and consequences and the shifting alliances of interest in colonial situations can be drawn from a consideration of alcohol in Africa (Dietler 2006a; Pan 1975). As in many other colonial situations, the roles of alcohol were extremely complicated and even contradictory, ranging (often simultaneously) from an intended implement of seduction and control, to an imagined vector of disorder, to a major source of colonial and postcolonial state revenue, to a central component of a subversive alternative economy (bootleg production, smuggling, and so on). In West Africa, distilled spirits (brandy, rum, and gin) played a major role in the Atlantic slave trade from its origins, serving as a commodity, a currency, and a lubricant for establishing exchange relationships (Ambler 2003; Pan 1975). Every bit as much as sugar, liquor became a key trade item in the triangle that linked Europe, Africa, and the Americas: it was traded to African rulers for slaves who worked the American sugar plantations that provided the raw material for rum that was used to obtain more slaves. Moreover, the growing slave-sugar economy also made cheap rum readily available to the working classes of England and Holland for the first time during the seventeenth century (Matthee 1995:44).

After the incorporation of Africa into various European empires in the nineteenth century (and earlier in South Africa), alcohol became a subject of ambivalence, conflicting discourses, and shifting policies and alliances—but always one of major concern. On the one hand, the colonial state in most regions began to rely upon taxes on alcohol for a substantial part of its operating revenues (Akyeampong 1996; Crush and Ambler 1992; Pan 1975). French West Africa, for example, derived about 70 percent of its revenues from alcohol duties in the early twentieth century (Pan 1975:16). These states also depended upon alcohol for the recruitment and pacification of a native labor force (Crush and Ambler 1992; Holtzman 2001; Suggs and Lewis 2003). On the other hand, anxiety about the effects of alcohol in aggravating the unruliness of an already suspect subject population and in disrupting work discipline also became pervasive. Moreover, the prevalence of a strong temperance ideology among Protestant missionaries led to both political agitation for state limitations on alcohol and direct attempts to influence African drinking practices and beliefs through religious conversion.

The result of these conflicting forces was that alcohol became a constant subject of colonial legislation and (usually unsuccessful) attempts to control native consumption and production of alcohol while promoting the sale of revenue-producing imported varieties or state monopolies. Not surprisingly, alcohol also became a central object of contestation between the colonial state and both

African leaders and local brewers, and this is a struggle that has continued in postcolonial African states (Akyeampong 1996; Colson and Scudder 1988; Crush and Ambler 1992; Dietler and Herbich 2006; Gewald 2002; Partanen 1991; Willis 2002). Increasing commoditization of alcohol in these colonial contexts also frequently set off conflict between generations and genders (as senior men felt their power challenged by liberalized access to a potent political symbol and tool) and, for example, between traditionalists and Christian converts. It sometimes has produced curious alliances of interest as well, as in the case of senior women and young male drinkers uniting in opposition to official alcohol restrictions (Gewald 2002) or in the case of colonial officials enacting restrictive liquor laws in Ghana, despite the loss of considerable revenues, in order to support the desire of local chiefs for selective access to alcohol and to shore up the social control of these senior men upon whom the state depended (Akyeampong 1996). As will be shown below, cross-cultural consumption of alcohol was equally significant (and complex) in the articulation of colonial relations in the ancient Mediterranean.

### **Reflections on an Ancient Mediterranean Case**

After these selective reflections on a few key theoretical issues concerning the relationship between food, colonialism, and identity, let me conclude this essay with a very brief consideration of this theme in the context of my research in the ancient Western Mediterranean as a way of suggesting somewhat more concretely the relevance to archaeological analysis.

The colonial encounter in Gaul was initiated during the late seventh century B.C. when a ship-based trade began bringing goods from Etruscan city-states in west-central Italy to the native Celtic-speaking inhabitants along the coast of southern France (see Dietler 1997, 2005b). At approximately 600 B.C., the colonial city of Massalia (which became modern Marseille) was founded on the Provençal coast by settlers from the Greek city of Phocaea, in modern Turkey, as the first permanent colonial establishment in the region. Over the course of the next few centuries, Massalia also began to establish a number of subcolonies along the coast to both the east and west (at Nice, Antibes, Hyères, Agde, and other locations). The extent of territory controlled by Massalia remained very small for centuries (essentially a small circle of agricultural land around the city and a few coastal outposts), but it engaged in a flourishing trade with the natives of the region, as well as occasional hostilities.

The late second century B.C. marked a dramatic change in the history of the evolving colonial situation. By the end of the third century B.C., armies of the rapidly expanding Roman Republic had already seized control of Spain from Carthaginian colonists and native Iberians during the Second Punic War. At least twice during the first half of the second century B.C., Rome responded to calls for aid from its ally, Massalia, in conflicts with its indigenous neighbors. In 125 B.C., another such appeal from Massalia resulted in Roman intervention on a large scale and the beginning of Roman control. The Romans launched a rapid military conquest of Mediterranean France, creating a land bridge between their

recently acquired possessions in northern Italy and Spain. This was followed by the military suppression of numerous rebellions and the gradual imposition of an imperial administrative infrastructure in what became the Roman province of Gallia Narbonensis that lasted for over half a millennium.

Roman involvement in Mediterranean France differed radically in character from that of any earlier colonial agents. Rome was the first of the Mediterranean states to have the military and administrative capacity, and perhaps the imperialist ambitions, to impose political control beyond a small territory immediately surrounding a port city. The cultural techniques of domination employed by the Romans were very effective. However, although the eventual social and cultural effects of Roman domination were profound, they were neither immediate nor uniform, and colonized peoples had a marked influence on the regionally distinctive development of colonial cultures and imperial practices (Wells 1999; Woolf 1998). Nevertheless, to name only the most obvious of the eventual transformations that stemmed from this colonial situation, the Roman occupation resulted in the gradual extinction of indigenous languages throughout the region (and in the rest of Gaul, Spain, and Italy as well) and their replacement with creolized versions of Latin.

So what role did food play in this series of colonial encounters, and what does an examination of foodways tell us about transformations of identity? In the first place, it is clear that the natives of southern France quickly developed an avid, but highly selective, interest in the consumption of imported Etruscan and Massaliote wine and drinking ceramics. Sherds of wine amphorae and drinking ceramics (predominantly drinking cups) are found by the thousands at virtually all settlements within about 50 km of the coast (Dietler 1990b, 2005b; Py 1993). However, for at least the first couple of centuries of the encounter, the indigenes appear to have been interested in almost nothing else the Greeks or Etruscans had to offer. For example, there is no evidence for the importation of olive oil, and, as late as the first century B.C., Posidonios remarked that the Gauls were still unfamiliar with the taste of olive oil and did not like it. Nor did they show an interest in the other cooking or tableware ceramics used by the Massalioites. Hence, the thirst for wine was clearly not related to a broader interest in Greek cuisine. Other aspects of Greek culture, such as writing, coinage, clothing, weaponry, and religion, also were ignored for centuries. The Massalioites, for their part, became increasingly dependant on the local Gauls for their grain supply. Posidonios remarked that the territory of Massalia was excellent for vines and olive trees but too arid for grain; hence, the Massalioites used their vineyards to acquire grain through trade.

For the Gauls, wine was an alien form of alcoholic beverage that they quickly adapted to indigenous feasting institutions and practices. It never replaced indigenous beer and mead as forms of alcohol but rather augmented these drinks. It would have been especially valued for its much greater capacity for preservation. Native beers would have turned sour within a few days of fermentation and were made for immediate consumption, whereas wine could be kept in amphorae for years. In marked contrast to indigenous beers, wine had great potential as a trade commodity that could be stored, accumulated, and transported over long distances. Moreover, it should be emphasized that wine was appropriated and



adapted to local feasting practices rather than being part of an adoption of the Greek social drinking ritual, the symposium. The weight of contextual and artifactual evidence indicates that its consumption cannot be interpreted as a move toward cultural emulation but rather was a creative indigenization of an alien food (Dietler 1990a, 1998). Nor can this be interpreted as a form of “hybridity,” in the sense that this term has acquired in postcolonial theory, following Bhabha’s (1985) cultural expansion of Bakhtin’s (1981) extension of this biological metaphor to linguistics.<sup>2</sup> The political structure of the colonial situation is radically different from the kind of imperial context analyzed by Bhabha, and it simply makes no sense to imagine an intentionally subversive mimicry among the politically autonomous peoples of southern France who were trading for Etruscan and Massaliote wine. Although clearly part of the colonial history of the region and although all these groups were involved in efforts to exert control over others, the relationship of Etruria and Massalia to indigenous peoples was not initially one of domination and resistance, and cultural appropriations by the Gauls were motivated by their own local social relations and cultural logic rather than some contestatory dialogue with Massalia.

This pattern of consumption continued for hundreds of years without any significant indigenous production of wine: for a period of over five centuries, wine remained throughout Gaul a commodity that had to be obtained by exchange—from Etruria, Massalia, and, eventually, Rome. The only exception to this is at the port town of Lattes, on the coast near Montpellier, where evidence has been found of wine production for local consumption by the late third century B.C. (Buxó i Capdevila 1996). However, this apparently occurred nowhere else in Gaul outside Massalia until after the Roman conquest.<sup>3</sup> Curiously, there is evidence of indigenous olive oil production beginning in the late fourth century B.C. at a number of sites in the immediate hinterland of Massalia and at Lattes (Brun 1993). However, this appears to have been destined to service the demand of Massalia and its new subcolonies rather than for native consumption. Hence, although the adoption of wine did not produce dramatic transformations of identity or culture, it did set off a process of increasing economic entanglement that had a marked impact on the structuring of the regional political economy.

With the coming of the Romans, a close examination of the contextual evidence from the site of Lattes indicates that despite the military takeover of the region and the establishment of a Roman colony only 90 km away at Narbonne during the late second century B.C., the initial impact on indigenous lifeways of the Roman presence in the region was neither sudden nor dramatic. The source of imported wine shifted from Massalia to Rome and the volume of trade increased exponentially, such that ships carrying cargoes of up to 10,000 amphorae brought as many as 550,000 to 650,000 amphorae per year into Gaul (Tchernia 1986). Imported tableware ceramics, now in a slightly broader range of forms, came from Italy as well. But little else changed at first. For example, there was no adoption of Roman dress or weaponry, nor was there a rapid alteration of the urban landscape reflecting Roman conceptions of spatial organization or the use of Roman building techniques and materials (such as roofing tiles, painted frescoes, and mosaics). The only notable transformation that is detectable is a rapid mon-

etization of the economy in which coinage became for the first time a common part of daily life—although, tellingly, Roman coinage played only a very minor role in this phenomenon (Dietler 2004).

Quite drastic changes did eventually occur, but not until the Augustan period, about a century after the first incursion of Roman armies into the region. For the most part, a Lattois citizen from previous centuries would have felt quite comfortable in the town during the couple of generations that followed the conquest, and this includes the matter of food. For example, despite a massive increase in the importation of Roman wine into Gaul, contemporary Greco-Roman texts confirm the continued consumption of native drinks (beer and mead) in the region alongside wine. In addition, the excavation of domestic structures shows no evident transformation of culinary patterns toward Roman practices. As in previous centuries, there was still a highly selective appropriation and indigenization of a limited number of exotic ingredients.

It is only during the Augustan period, beginning near the end of the millennium, that one begins to see the use of a full range of Roman ceramics and a significant transformation of cuisine. This was accompanied by a dramatic restructuring of the urban landscape and architecture. In terms of identity, it seems highly probable that, whatever the view from Rome, before the Augustan period the residents of Lattes had not yet begun to envisage themselves as part of an imperial world with Rome as its center. In the local context this meant that the inhabitants of Lattes remained first and foremost Lattois. That is, they had not yet become little fish in a big pond but were still the big fish in their own little pond. This seems evident from the continuity in bodily adornment and the absence of any indication of a mimetic appropriation of Roman attire or cuisine (Dietler 2004). It is only with the imposition of the new Augustan techniques of control (the census, taxation, urban building projects, and so on) that we see a shift in this pattern indicating a new sense of the formation of a Roman provincial identity, something that was accomplished by first attaching local elites to the imperial project. However, this did not result in a simple copying of Rome but rather the emergence of a new creolized colonial society in which cultural elements were merged in complex fusions and syncretisms (Wells 1999; Woolf 1998).

In conclusion, I hope that this rather hasty dash through a very complex subject has at least served to suggest the nature of the relationship between food, identity, and colonialism—and to suggest the heuristic value for an archaeology of colonialism of an analytical focus on food. The intimate links between food practices and the embodiment of identity and between commensality and politics make the domain of food a central arena for the working out of colonial struggles over the colonization of consciousness and strategies of appropriation and resistance. They also make food, given the development of appropriate research strategies and theoretical frameworks, a highly productive point of entry for exploring the transformation of both identity and the political economy in colonial contexts. If we are what we eat, then keeping our eyes on what we consume can be a revealing way of understanding the forces that structure what we become—and in understanding the everyday local experience and global history of colonialism.

## Notes

1. All unreferenced discussions of Luo practices are derived from ethnographic fieldwork carried out by Ingrid Herbich and me in western Kenya from 1980 to 1983 (e.g., see Dietler and Herbich 1993; Herbich and Dietler 1991, 1993). Funding was provided by the National Science Foundation, the L. S. B. Leakey Foundation, The Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the Boise Fund of Oxford University, for which we are extremely grateful. Our thanks also to the National Museums of Kenya, the Office of the President of Kenya, and the British Institute in Eastern Africa. *Erokamano maduong'* to the Luo people and to our field assistants Monica Oyier, the late Elijah Oduor Ogutu, and most especially Rhoda Onyango.

2. Hybridity is a concept that has become popular recently with a number of archaeologists wishing to apply postcolonial theory to ancient colonial situations. Unfortunately, it is all too frequently used erroneously in such a way that all cultural adoptions are simply described as a process of hybridity, thereby voiding the concept of its specificity and analytical power. Within postcolonial studies, it is primarily Homi Bhabha's construction of the term *hybridity* that has come to define this concept. His conceptualization is based upon a distinction made by Bakhtin (1981) between "organic" hybridity and "intentional" hybridity in his application of this biological metaphor to language. The former represents a kind of unintentional, unconscious fusion of elements from different languages, whereas the latter represents an intentional, politically subversive, contestatory action that allows the unmasking of difference and the challenging of linguistic authority. It was this latter usage that was picked up by Bhabha (1985) and applied to cultural phenomena in an attempt to explain the way that mimicry by the colonized serves to challenge univocal cultural meaning asserted by the colonizer (see Young 1995 for a critical discussion). Uses of the term that obscure Bakhtin's fundamental distinction do violence to the concept and leave it as simply a vague descriptive metaphor.

3. The contrast with Spain is striking. There native Iberians began to make wine as early as the seventh century B.C. with techniques adopted from Phoenician colonists, and they quickly engaged in export production on a large scale in amphorae modeled after Phoenician types (Guérin and Gómez Bellard 1999). In fact, in Gaul, throughout Roussillon and Western Languedoc it was Iberian amphorae rather than Massaliote that became numerically dominant, although Massaliote amphorae were certainly imported in significant quantities as well (Gailledrat 1997; Ugolini and Pezin 1993).

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