FOOD SOCIOLOGY: PARADIGMS AND METHODS

First summer school for the ENCAFE
(European Network for the Comparative Analysis on Food and Eating)[1]
Report by Tristan Fournier[2]

Presentation of the ENCAFE network and the summer school

The first summer school for the ENCAFE (European Network for the Comparative Analysis on Food and Eating) network was held from the 28th of June to 2nd of July 2010 at Taylor's University in Subang Jaya, Malaysia. This network, founded in 2006, aims at connecting teams of researchers from several European countries[3] around the main themes of food sociology: consumption, health, food production, eating behaviors, eating disorders, food safety, etc. The goal of organizing a summer school was to extend the network to doctoral students giving them exposure to international expertise, and to herald ENCAFE's expansion to Asia. Representing the ENCAFE network were teams from Denmark (University of Copenhagen and Aarhus University), Sweden (University of Uppsala), Norway (SIFO – National Institute for Consumer Research), England (University of Manchester) and France (University of Toulouse). In addition to Taylor's University, two other Asian universities also joined the event: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and National University Singapore. The choice of Taylor's University for this inaugural event can be explained by long-standing ties between Taylor's School of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts and the University of Toulouse Le Mirail, and ENCAFE's affirmation to increase cooperation with Asia.

The four-day conference was structured to allow for presentations by senior ENCAFE researchers to outline theoretical frameworks and answer epistemological questions from the research teams, while inviting PhD students to showcase their ongoing studies. Each student's work was discussed with another student, and

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[3] The network brings together the University of Copenhagen (Denmark), the University of Barcelona (Spain), the University of Oviedo (Spain), the University of Tartu (Estonia), The National Consumer Research Center of Helsinki (Finland), the University of Toulouse Le Mirail (France), the SIFO of Oslo (Norway), the University of Manchester (United Kingdom), and the University of Uppsala (Sweden).

then with the expert audience. The presentations of the senior researchers are summarized below. This is followed by the work of the doctoral students, which will be grouped according to themes.

Presentations by senior researchers

Jean-Pierre Poulain (University of Toulouse Le Mirail, France), recent publication: *Sociologie de l'obésité*, PUF, 2009

Food sociology: Paradigms and methods

Poulain, as the holder of the partnership between Taylor's University and the University of Toulouse, presented the first paper of the conference with an epistemological perspective for identifying reasons why food sociology has failed to emerge as a legitimate scientific discipline. One of the reasons may be Durkheim's definition of social fact in his proposed rules for sociology. Food is ambiguous because of its often transient nature yet the behavior connected to it, such as table manners, are subject to the socialization process. This ambiguity regarding the position of food partly explains why it has so long remained simply a platform of indexing other issues deemed more fundamental in society, for example, work, religion, consumption, migration, and gender. Another reason is the 'primitive' nature of early ethnological research. However, this is no longer a problem thanks to the work of Lévi-Strauss and Condominas. The contributions of Mauss and Morin are also essential as they allowed the concept of food to serve as a link between the biological, psychological and socio-cultural, therefore legitimizing cross-disciplinary approaches. Poulain then looked at the different strands of food sociology: one that identifies the social determinants of food behavior; and the other of sociology *through* food, where the analysis of the food constitutes a framework for the study of society. He further explained his concept of 'food social space', and went on to describe the various movements within modern food from the medical, legal, historical, political perspectives to environmental and animal welfare concerns. He also introduced the idea of 'nutritional transition', and questioned the position and role of food within this process. He specifically attempted to understand what happens after the nutritional transition. Two scenarios were considered: first, a North American perspective of self-regulation which hypothesizes that eaters are better able to regulate their energy balance; and second, a European viewpoint which maintains that a public health policy for nutrition is necessary to change eating habits (especially given the rise in obesity). Poulain concluded his presentation by pointing to the gap between the norms which eaters are subject to, and their real eating practices as a difficulty to be overcome for more detailed analysis of the sociology of food.

Lotte Holm (University of Copenhagen, Denmark), recent publication: "Food consumption and political agency: On concerns and practices among Danish consumers", *International Journal of Consumer,* 2008, 32(6): 667-674 (with B. Halkier).

Meal patterns in the Nordic countries

Holm's paper was presented in three parts: the first dealing with the changes of food habits in Europe from the pre-industrial era to modern time; then a study on eating behavior in the Nordic countries and, finally, another on the monitoring of diets. To describe the changes in eating habits, she built on research by Rotenberg on the impact of industrialization on food patterns in Vienna, Austria. Three periods were identified: pre-industrialization (five meals a day, a large hot meal at noon, meals with family, friends and/or colleagues), industrialization (three meals a day, meals more utilitarian, less meals with family and friends), and modernity (prepared meals, 'gastro-anomy'*,* globalization, standardization, snacks, finger food, and individualization). The first quantitative analysis that she presented was conducted in 2001 within the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden). The questionnaires were administered through the phone and aimed at retracing the food habits of those surveyed and at testing the hypothesis of a certain 'vagabond feeding'. She found that eating rhythms were still well defined and largely socialized (family, friends). An interesting side note was that individuals who ate alone have a diet of lower nutritional quality than those who ate in a group. Besides, there is a higher flexibility and a questioning on the existence of a unic food culture. The monitoring study focused on a diet administered to 30 healthy individuals aged 20 to 30 years. This diet followed carefully the Danish equivalent of the French National Plan for Health and Nutrition. Some results were surprising: the portions were too big, and there was too much fish and a lack of dairy products. The study showed that changes concerning the reduction of milk and butter consumption were easy. On the other hand, the most difficult foodstuff to regulate regarding its consumption was cheese. The presentation finished with summaries of work done by her doctoral students on social representations of hunger and satiety.

Alan Warde (University of Manchester, UK), recent publication: *Eating out: Social differentiation, consumption, and pleasure*, Cambridge University Press, 2000 (avec L. Martens).

Food and fun: Eating out, identity and globalization

The sociological theory proposed by Warde is rooted in the anxiety over our relationship with food. This anxiety being the result of a food 'alteration', 'de-socialization' and of the phenomenon of 'gastro-anomy'. He proposes to analyze the forms of out-of-home dining (OHD) since they could identify the changes in food consumption and the social representations associated with them. He believes OHD has changed direction in that while it requires more money and time, it is also a source of pleasure and exists in many forms. In

addition, this theme is particularly interesting to study as it must be linked with the analysis of risk (of a health, behavioral and from a symbolic point of view). His conclusions are based on a quantitative study conducted in England on a population of 1563 about OHD. He found that fast food was viewed in a negative way (as being bad for hygiene, health, as temptation of children, as lacking product consistency and 'ritual'). 'De-socialization' was also associated with OHD: incivility, individualization, replacement of the family meal, end of routines and of the social frame, and disruption of the rules of conviviality. Warde also talked about 'glocalization' and the segmentation of tastes. He asked respondents to rank types of restaurants based on their preferences. The least popular were the fast food, vegetarian and Indian. Their favorites were the hotel restaurants, Chinese/Thai, Italian and Indian. A strong social differentiation was noted in the types of restaurant preferences, for example, the most educated people appreciated French restaurants although this type of restaurant was seldom mentioned by the middle classes. Warde transcends references to Bourdieu's sociology (*Distinction*) by using the work of Boltanski and Thévenot to take into account the mediating factors which influence consumer judgments especially in restaurant selection. The inclination for exotic food is, according to him, related to tourism, migration and intercultural exchange, and its reception by British consumers. This reception follows a sequential process: denial, naturalization, improvisation and then authentication. For Warde, globalization means diversity and diffusion. Food is complex and needs to be analyzed in terms of reproduction and recreation. He proposed further study on the influences between *eating out* and *eating in.*

Unni Kjaernes (SIFO, Norway), recent publication: *Trust in food: A comparative and institutional analysis,* Palgrave MacMillan, 2007 (with Mr. Harvey and A. Warde).

Eating: The significance of trust

Trust is a key concept when it comes to food, especially when it comes to supply, since that can be connected to a certain social order (for example, hunger strikes). Nevertheless there have been and continue to be many changes that have reconfigured this notion of trust in the field of food consumption, such as transformations of markets and politics, the weight of the media, social mobilization, and consumer associations. From a theoretical point of view, four approaches to trust can be identified: the researches in psychology and in marketing, the work on communication and risk perception, decision theories and researches on knowledge and information. From a sociological point of view, she proposes to bridge the notions of trust and modernity, and thus distinguish two approaches, a pessimistic one found in the work of Beck and Giddens (trust as a reflexive choice), and Putnam (trust produced by social capital); and an optimistic one espoused by Luhmann (trust as a reduction mechanism of complexity) and Guseva and Rona-Tas (where modernization tends to reduce the need of trust). According to her, food modernity sees the

notion of trust becoming increasingly vulnerable. She then presented the results of a survey on trust conducted among consumers from six European countries. The surveyed showed that the English were the most confident in giving their trust to twelve different food products whereas the Germans and Italians were the most suspicious. Yet the English were those who trusted least consumer associations (although they are quite popular in other countries) and had the most confidence in farmers. The English also thought that food security, nutrition, cultural techniques, and the quality and price of food had improved in their diet. At the end, public opinion towards modern solutions that tried to reintroduce trust between consumers and their food ranged from confidence to skepticism.

Jukka Gronow (University of Uppsala, Sweden), recent publication: *The sociology of taste,* Routledge, 1997.

Food innovations, fashions and fads

Gronow reflected on new trends and changes in the food field and sought to distinguish between innovations, fashion and fads (or trends). He theoretically justified his choices by highlighting three concepts. Regarding innovation, he relied on the work of Schumpeter who emphasized the difference between innovation and invention, innovation here defined as creating something of novelty within social practices.
For fashion, he quoted Simmel for whom this phenomenon is representative of modernity and consisted of a dual process of distinction/identity.
Finally, he distinguished fad from fashion by noting that it is less related to the phenomena of differentiation, is more irrational, and it is not long-lasting. Based on this theoretical framework, he produced a table with various forms of food (menus, dishes, cooking, order and number of items, ingredients and so on), labeled as innovations, fashions or fads. The table led to several discussions regarding changes in the status of the food, for example, when does an innovation becomes a standard? Can innovation or fashion be discussed in a micro socio-cultural context?

Vineeta Sinha (Singapore National University), coming publication: *Religion and commodification: Merchandizing diasporic Hinduism,* Routledge, 2010.

Religion and food

Sinha's presentation questioned the phenomenon of food practices based on several Asian religions (especially Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and Confucianism), and then showed a documentary on the links

between food and religion in Singapore. Three themes structured his anthropological researches: the gaps between texts and religious practices, the intercultural comparisons in the same religions (including multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies like Singapore and Malaysia), and the historical evolution of the links between religion and food. After an introduction on the symbolic and purifying values of food taken from research by Douglas, she described the phenomena of food offerings by asking this simple question: why do worshipers offer food to their deities? Furthermore, she asked if this practice belonged to the field of devotion or spirituality. Was it a form of 'thanks giving'? She focused on Hinduism where food is viewed from two distinct levels: a physical plane (visible and organic), and an imperceptible one (hidden, essential and spiritual). Food therefore represents the body, mind and soul. The film described various religious rituals related to food among Hindus and Buddhists in Singapore. It also told the story of a devout woman who sees herself as the physical incarnation of a deity of Chinese religions. Hence the place of food is fundamental to the offerings made to her, and she uses alcohol and cigarettes soaked in opium to let the deity that she embodies speak with the worshipers who come to express their wishes and fears to her.

Gilles Boëtsch (CNRS, University Aix - Marseille, France), recent publication : *Dictionnaire du corps,* CNRS Editions, 2008 (with B. Andrieu).

Biological anthropology of food and anthropology of the body

Boëtsch, President of the Scientific Council of the CNRS (*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique - National Center of the Scientific Research*) and the anthropologist director of the International Joint Unit on the 'Environment, Health and Societies', began by reviewing the scientific status of biological anthropology defined as the interaction between biology and culture. This discipline has seen its investigative techniques revolutionized by the use of biometric and genetic markers resulting in methods are more quantitative. He discussed the role of the environment and culture in replacing race as the explanation for differences. He noted that the relationship between morphology and the body is also cultural. Race, sex, age, and now weight are being used in looking at the anthropology of the body. The problems of racism, sexism and ageism are known but society is just beginning to deal with discrimination based on obesity. He also found theoretical frameworks in the anthropology of food, where food mirrors relationships between the environment and social organizations. He proposed to bring together the anthropology of the body and the anthropology of food because the human body is being seen as a biocultural object. It is possible to use this new paradigm because of the search for identity, because of food diversity, and of the quest for eternal youth. This is why weight and age are two dimensions that must be integrated with anthropological researches on food. He then showed a montage of archive footage and commercials on the evolution of the social representations of obesity and youth.

Amri Baharuddin Shamsul (KITA Institute, Universiti Malaysia Kebansaan, Malaysia), recent publication: "The religious, the multiple, the secular and the modern: A brief critical survey on Islam in Malaysia", *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies,* 2004, 5(3): 341-356 (with A. Aziz).

From conflict to cohesion: A paradigm shift in analysis in Malaysia

Shamsul provided a better understanding of the social reality of the Malaysian multi-ethnic context. He questioned the construction of scientific knowledge and particularly social sciences in Malaysia. This knowledge largely developed after World War II, was therefore built on an approach based on conflict and helps to explain the large proportion of studies in development, politics and ethnicity. To define Malaysia, he used the domino concept. On one hand; the security policy of the country was threatened on several levels: by the military (communist insurgency 1948-1960), the work (strikes), the racial (inter-ethnic tensions), the political (ethnic discrimination) and the social (religious reforms). Several solutions were proposed to counter these threats: a martial one (emergency situation 1948-1960), a political one (independence) and a social one (creation of a social contract). There is thus a form of democracy in Malaysia, but a precarious one. Hence the question of whether Malaysia should be defined in terms of cohesion or conflict. On the one hand, the cohesion process would be noticeable and would operate as structural anthropology: assimilation, adaptation, acculturation and amalgamation. The country has a good reputation due mainly to its image as a model of a multi-ethnic society and its record of economic development, but there is a social reality that can sometimes be a problem and can lead to considering the country from a conflict perspective. Hence, cohesion is often punctuated with problems. Language, education and the economy are good indicators of this ambivalence in that they unite and divide at the same time. He concluded that, "we talk conflict, cohesion we walk".

Presentations from PhD students

Food and health

Three papers considered the links between food and health. Bodil Just Christensen and Line Hillersdal (University of Copenhagen, Denmark) addressed the social and cultural aspects of hunger and satiety in Denmark with the following question: what leads some people to stop eating while others to continue? The research, using observations and interviews, tests various hypotheses in three groups: patients who had undergone gastric bypass operations (representatives of obesity and changes in eating behavior); those stationed in a military barracks (attitudes to food rationing); and lambda eaters gathered around organized dinners (influence of interactive contexts). Anne Dupuy (University of Toulouse Le Mirail, France) revisited the

protective effects of social interaction and commensality on certain changes inherent in modern food consumption by looking at different populations (children and adults). She wanted to understand how social regulations that result in part from the commensality can have an impact on the socialization and transmissions of values, norms and practices in France. Tristan Fournier's paper (University of Toulouse Le Mirail, France) considered the influences of social links on health in 800 hypercholesterolaemic people having received some nutritional recommendations from their practitioner. Their family situations and instances when they had to manage food, such as shopping, cooking and eating out, were identified as social determinants of dietary compliance.

New eating habits

Two other papers researched new dietary practices. The first, by Anne Holst Andersen (Aarhus University, Denmark), focused on the processes that lead Danish individuals to become consumers of organic food. Borrowing from the Chicago School's concept of 'career', she tried to identify the different phases and career determinants that influence this change, focusing on life stages and variability in the use of organic products; her work is close to Lamine's one. The second, by Olivier Lepiller (University of Toulouse Le Mirail, France), addressed preference for 'natural' foods from a theoretical point of view. He used his research to interpret the various sociological approaches to food in France. Four approaches were identified: a psycho-socio-anthropological method conducted by physicians in the 60s; Fischler's socio-anthropological view of eater; an approach based on the sociology of taste from Grignon in the tradition of Bourdieu; and finally, and most recently, Lamine's pragmatic sociology of eater adapted from Bessy and Chateauraynaud.

Identities and food heritage

The final three papers may be linked by questions of cultural identity and heritage. Elise Mognard (University of Toulouse Le Mirail, France) tackles the thorny issue of our relationship to the animal using the case study of 'foie gras' (goose or duck liver) in the southwest of France. The research was conducted among tourists – both French and non-French, to look at, on the one hand the touristic experience and the need to taste the heritage of the region; and on the other, concern for the animal's welfare (the foie gras being considered by some activists as the emblem of torture and domination of man over the animal). Anne-Emmanuelle Fiamor's presentation (University of Toulouse Le Mirail, France) described a form of 'traditionalization' by using the present as a way of legitimating farm production in Drome, France. She questioned the importance of the balance between a development supported by the agricultural stakeholders and a related development based

on political strategies from the perspective of local food production. Using the anthropological concept of 'diffusion of techniques', Eric Olmedo (University of Toulouse Le Mirail, France) reflected on how taste and cultural identity can interfere in the formation of staff in the kitchens and restaurants of luxury hotels in multi-ethnic Malaysian society, given that the trainers are European and that the employees come from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Some conclusions

Three elements emerged from this inaugural ENCAFE summer school. First, that many tools and empirical difficulties were shared by different researchers, and the examples of the need to bridge the many gaps between norms and food practices prove this.

Second, was the question of which language was to be used for research. While English remains a crucial language in the academic world to exchange and develop international comparisons, there is still need to support research in other languages especially in food sociology given the strong scientific traditions of non-English speaking countries (France, Spain, etc.).

Finally, food sociology, it was stressed, is an evolving discipline and one which could gain recognition and status by emphasizing the study of social phenomena through the food.