

Editorial

Mediations of Food: Identity, Power, and Contemporary Global Imaginaries

Dr. Tina Sikka

Newcastle University, UK

Food is packed with meaning, as well as vitamins, carbohydrates and protein. It satisfies needs beyond those of the body and the pocketbook. Food is a medium to build families, religious communities, ethnic boundaries and a consciousness of history.

Richard R. Wilk, *Home Cooking in the Global Village:
Caribbean Food from Buccaneers to Ecotourists*

The study of food and its intersection with media, identity, technology, and culture has, over the past few years, become an important and well represented subject in a variety of disciplines including communication studies (Greene and Cramer, 2011; Overbey, Jaykus and Chapman, 2017), sociology (Beardworth, 2002; Gronow, 2002), urban studies (Koc, 1999; Cummins and Macintyre, 2002), political science (Carolan, 2016; Falkner, 2006), geography (Bohle, Downing and Watts, 1994; Sonnino, 2016), and anthropology (Counihan, 2018; Hubert, 2004) to name a few. As a result, the selection of articles in this volume, titled “Mediations of Food: Identity, Power, and Contemporary Global Imaginaries,” reflects an eclecticism that resonates with the interdisciplinary nature of how food has been taken up as a phenomenon worthy of significant scholarly attention.

I was approached to edit this volume of *Global Media Studies* just over a year ago and, at the time, had completed the long process of writing a book on feminist science studies and climate change. As often happens when one focuses so intently on one area for so long, I had been searching for other subjects of consequence that overlapped with my interest in feminist science and happened on a rather niche article by Greta Gaard titled, ‘Toward a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies.’ In it, Gaard uses feminist science studies to examine milk through the lens of history, religion, survival, gender roles, political economy, risk, health, intersectionality, and power – all in twenty-three insightful pages. I was sold. It was from this initial article that I crafted this call for papers and, what follows, is the result.

The ideas taken up in these four articles center food in one way or another and are constituted by illuminating analyses of contemporary discourses and practices that include ‘aging well’ and health, vegan ecofeminism, food in postcolonial film, and transnational framings of food in the context of conservationism. The thematic throughline joining each of these pieces with one another is an abiding concern with the politics of power, sociality, health, and justice.

The volume begins with Université de Montréal PhD. Candidate Myriam Durocher who, in her article “Le “bien se nourrir”... ou le ”bien vieillir” contemporain? Une analyse des corps vieillissants produits aux croisements de l’alimentation “saine” et des injonctions au “bien vieillir”, combines a micro and macro perspective in order to examine contemporary foodways in Quebec – particularly as it relates to the discourse of “successful aging.” She demonstrates how the mutable, power-laden, and conflictual process by which what constitutes “healthy food” is defined (primarily by those in power – but also replicated by those affected), centres around discourses of disease prevention, safety, and the mitigation of premature aging in a manner that instrumentalizes and reduces food to its nutritional components. This is reinforced by the neoliberal deployment of a ‘choice’ and ‘responsibility’ framing that is both exclusionary and pathologizing. Durocher calls for an approach to food and aging that eschews an outsized focus on control and, instead, addresses the role of gender, race, sexuality, and class in shaping our ability to meet the conditions of having ‘aged well.’

In ‘Contemporary Feminist Politics of Veganism: Carol J. Adams’ *The Sexual Politics of Meat* and Alternative Approaches,’ Dr. Ayce F. Yilmaz makes the case for a reexamination of vegan ecofeminism as expressed in the work of Carol J. Adams which she puts forth as an impactful and resonant framework from which to reveal and challenge structures of oppression, anthropocentrism, androcentrism, and speciesism. Yilmaz defends vegan ecofeminism against charges of gender essentialism and its perceived tendency to invisibilise sex workers and the queer community – particularly within the context of “extensive digitalization, expanding new technologies and transnational media industries.” In doing so, Yilmaz demonstrates how vegan ecofeminism, as a practice and epistemology, has the capacity to encourage modes of thought that challenge gender binaries as well as dominant gender roles and traditional dietary practices that are, at their core, exploitative, alienating, and oppressive.

In “Colonial Food Metaphors in Postcolonial Cinema: The Case of Michelange Quay’s *Eat, for This is My Body*,” Dr. Vanessa Lee performs a perspicacious analysis of the Haitian film, *Eat, for This is My Body* (2007) through the lens of postcoloniality and racism in which food and food imagery play a central role. The colonial trope of the savage, for example, is shown to be constituted, at least in part, through ‘barbaric eating practices’ and juxtaposed with the civilised eating practices of the coloniser by drawing on a particularly striking scene of insatiable eating in addition to a discussion of the role play by milk and mothering. The film itself, however, resists this framing by utilising these same metaphors to address history, challenge stereotypes, and articulate food imaginaries that disrupt the colonised/coloniser binary.

Finally, Dr. Jason J. Jarvis’ essay, “Shark Fin Soup: Collective Imagination in the Transnational Public Sphere,” delves into a critical examination of the shark as a figure of fear (think *Jaws* and *Shark Week* on the Discovery Channel), food, health, and status within the context of heightened concerns around conservation and ecological destruction. Using the framework of ‘collective imaginaries,’ Jarvis juxtaposes the trope of the shark as ‘Western’ monster with how it has been taken up Traditional Chinese Medicine (as source of healing, history, and wealth) and traces how this tension robs the shark itself of any agency. This in turn, has had deleterious implications for marine policy which Jarvis aims to disrupt by centering the shark and the agency of fragile ecosystems instead.

We also have a book review of Natalie Jovanovski’s text, *Digesting Femininities: The Feminist Politics of Contemporary Food Culture* in which Newcastle University PhD. student Nick Jensen provides a favourable and nuanced assessment of the book in which the author deploys a feminist framework to examine the relationship women have to food through the lens of care work, social media, discursive

construction, power, the body, and health. Its overall objective is to use this analysis to formulate what Jovanovski calls “a radical, genderless, food consciousness” (Jovanovski, 203).

Taken together, the articles compiled for this volume represent an array of literatures, ideas, concepts, themes, and methods in which food figures prominently and through which this entity that is both object and process, nature and culture, vital and superfluous is parlayed into thought-provoking and innovative kinds of analyses. I will close this brief introduction another quote – this time from Josée Johnston whose work in the area of food studies I have always found to be uniquely discerning – and which intimates where the critical studies of food and culture needs to look going forward:

A culinary cosmopolitan perspective resides in a context of tremendous inequality, but it may simultaneously facilitate meaningful cultural exchange, and attempt to link food choices to global risks like climate change.

Josée Johnston, *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*

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About the Editor

Dr. Tina Sikka is a Lecturer in Media and Culture at Newcastle University. Her research interests include the sociology of science and technology (inclusive of environmental science, nutritional science, health, food), as well as feminist praxis and well as the study of race. In addition to her academic work, Tina has written for such outlets as Jacobin, Lady Science and Alternet. Her most recent book is titled *Climate Technology, Gender, and Justice: The Standpoint of the Vulnerable* (Springer Press, 2019). Her research can be found at: <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/sacs/staff/profile/tinasikka.html>

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