

INTRODUCTION



SETTING THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL TABLE

INTRODUCTION

An array of rather formal-looking cutlery can be a daunting sight, and I vividly remember one such occasion when a friend's parents took us out to dinner at a “fancy” restaurant. A menu, a meal of many courses, what should I choose? I carefully listened and watched everyone, taking my cues about the selection of dishes, and when the first course arrived I hesitantly selected my cutlery, hoping to pass the etiquette test. I was okay until the bread was served and I helped myself, a *faux pas*, rather than waiting for the server to place my selection on my side plate. My cover was blown, an interloper at the table, although everyone was far too polite to draw attention to my discomfort. I did enjoy the meal, and the company, but it was made memorable by my cutlery anxiety. Since then I've been lucky enough to share meals in many places, and now feel less daunted, but I am still aware of etiquette and the unspoken pressure of the norms of commensality. I now regard cutlery as just a tool, although created through tradition and surrounded with etiquette, that breaks our food into manageable morsels, ferries it into our mouths where we taste, chew, swallow, and begin to digest its substance. Just like cutlery, the anthropological approach of this book can be regarded as offering a set of methodological and theoretical tools, not too daunting, to enable us to select, assess, chew, and mentally digest the significance of meals and dishes from a variety of cuisines. It aims to provide a guide to the world's rich diversity of eating culture, to help explore the similarities, understand the differences, and draw some general conclusions about our relationship with food.

Social anthropology is the study of the everyday lives of ordinary people, anywhere, and food is a constant—whether locally produced or globally sourced, it will always be eaten locally, as a member of society. Food, together with air and water, is the stuff of life, and it is the basic foundation of culture and society. The quest for food has been

an essential part of the evolution of humans through the millennia, accounting for the formation of cooperative foraging groups and serving as a source of our sociability by cooking and sharing food (Jones 2007; Wrangham 2009). Food is vital to our health and well-being, and yet humanity is still witnessing a struggle to produce, exchange, and eat the food we all need. Food is our everyday creative and meaningful engagement with nature through culture; indeed, food becomes cultured nature, an artifact. The designation as “food” underscores the cultural construction of what is deemed edible and places it in the category of an artifact, made by human ingenuity, from a series of ingredients and flavours, crafted and aestheticized into a dish. Humans don’t just randomly feed; we select, fashion, concoct, and make an edible assemblage that fits our imagining of food. This is an intimate relationship with an artifact, like no other; food is the only consumed cultural artifact that quite literally becomes us. Our relationship begins in the womb and extends throughout our lives as it shapes our daily habits and influences our health, defines our personal and group identity, and engages our minds and hands in its acquisition, preparation, and consumption. Yet this is a relationship that can be relegated to one that is presumed to be ubiquitous, ordinary or quotidian, and as such its significance in our lives can easily be overlooked. This happens especially when the provision of food is made so convenient we devote ourselves to other activities, and stop to eat only when hunger reminds us we need some fuel, but what we eat is still culturally and socially patterned. This book examines our changing relationship with food based upon its essential, chosen, patterned, discursive, and dynamic qualities.

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPETITE FOR FOOD

Humans have an appetite for food, and anthropology, as the study of human beings, their culture and society, through time and in any context, has an interest in the role of food. To go back to the work of two important early anthropologists, Franz Boas in North America and Bronislaw Malinowski in Europe, the presence of food is revealed in their respective writings on the Kwakiutl (Boas 1921) and Trobriand Islanders (Malinowski [1922] 1966), but its form was often eclipsed by the content of winter ceremonials, social organization, and the complexities of the *kula* ring or magic. Despite this, there were facts about what was deemed to be food, how it was cooked, and who ate together, which were included as background to the broader ethnographic narrative. This stands as a testament to both Boas’s and Malinowski’s emphasis upon including detailed descriptions of the everyday and the extraordinary occasions of life. For instance, Malinowski offers his thoughts on the “subject, method and scope” of social anthropology and these still stand the test of time. He presented an early, candid outline of the scientific fieldwork method, beginning

with the need to identify the framework of society, the context, which he noted could lack the everyday “realities of human life.” To correct this, “the imponderabilia of actual life” must be observed and vividly described, including “the manner of taking food and preparing it” (Malinowski 1966, 18). As he says, we must “remember that these imponderable, yet all important, facts of actual life are part of the real substance of the social fabric, that in them are spun the innumerable threads which keep together the family, the clan, the village community, the tribe—their significance becomes clear” (Malinowski 1966, 19). The everyday reality of life is most strongly felt and experienced by individuals, and Malinowski reminds the discipline of the need to include this in any fieldwork. He also recognizes that the imponderabilia equally applies to any culture and society, including ourselves, alerting us to the importance of reflecting on our own, often taken-for-granted activities, such as food and eating (Malinowski 1966, 19). The activities surrounding food acquisition, preparation, and consumption lend themselves to cross-cultural comparison, allowing us to conjure into existence others’ lives through a shared everyday experience of eating. This can be combined with Malinowski’s (1966, 22) third aim of scientific fieldwork: to record “the spirit—the natives’ views and opinions and utterances.” Here he captures the importance of the inside meanings given to life, those articulated by members of society and heard by the ethnographer in conversations, in interviews, and expressed as public discourse. While Malinowski’s language does not reflect current anthropological usage, his “final goal” remains valid, “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world” and in so doing perhaps “we shall have some light shed on our own” (Malinowski 1966, 25). Despite the age of Malinowski’s work it still rings true—the ordinary things of life are important and worthy of study, and this is exactly what the recent generation of anthropologists has done in regard to food.

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL METHODS AND PRINCIPLES

Anthropology is a very broad discipline, and as such it has divided itself into a series of subfields, within which scholars concentrate upon specific questions pertaining to human existence. While this book will have a brief foray into the subfield of biological anthropology, it is primarily concerned with the findings from **social anthropology**. In keeping with the eclectic interests of social anthropologists there is considerable overlap between their research and that of other disciplines addressing food, such as cultural geography, history, women’s studies, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and economics. This book draws upon the excellent work of researchers from all these disciplines and incorporates it into an overview guided by the principles of social anthropology. It will also highlight some of the different theoretical traditions employed by social anthropologists as they

have assessed and made sense of their research findings. But to begin, it is fieldwork that particularly distinguishes social anthropology, although this method's utility has appealed to other disciplines over the last decade. Within the ethnographic method are other anthropological approaches, such as holism and comparison, and the principle of cultural relativism, as discussed below.

ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK—LOCAL AND GLOBAL

Social anthropologists will conduct fieldwork for a relatively long period of time, and write an ethnographic account of that culture based upon their participant-observation. Malinowski's (1966, 9) definition of ethnography as the "empirical and descriptive results" of fieldwork still captures its essence. Fieldwork can be conducted in unfamiliar and familiar settings, since the discipline is concerned with human life anywhere, and its approach encourages cross-cultural comparison. However, the early beginnings of social anthropology tended to focus on non-Western societies where social anthropologists conducted fieldwork as part of "comparative sociology," and this legacy still lingers, but is not an absolute mandate. The early ethnographic work produced accounts of all aspects of a specific culture, providing a holistic record of its traditional lifeways. For example, many early social anthropologists included details about how food was acquired and used in particular cultures, such as John Swanton's (1905) Haida material, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's ([1964] 1922) Andaman Islanders, and Audrey Richards's ([1939] 1969; [1932] 1964) early work with the Bemba. **Holism** recognizes that all aspects of a culture are interconnected and influence one another. The holistic study of food reveals how its classification, form, and uses are intimately connected to food-getting strategies, the division of labour, exchange, social and political organization, religion, and intimate ties of kinship and friendship.

The early ethnographies created an illusion of culture as a bounded, timeless, fixed set of characteristic beliefs, values, norms, traditions, and behaviour that would define its members into the present. The use of the **ethnographic present** has underscored this representation of culture. The issue of change, and how this occurred, challenged the accuracy of portraying cultures in the present tense, and gradually through many years of subsequent theoretical debates the representation and understanding of culture became considerably more complex (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Marcus 1995). This shifted the focus of ethnographies away from somewhat static portraits to become problem-focused, addressing specific aspects of people's practices through more specialized theoretical approaches that consider such areas as economics, politics, religion, and kinship. These ethnographies are temporally located, revealing the changing

dynamics of culture and society, and they recognize that people, ideas, and things have always migrated and influenced each other, eroding the idea of hard and fast boundaries around isolated cultures (see Marcus 1995). The ethnographies of Richard Wilk (2006), Brad Weiss (2003), Jon Holtzman (2009), and Carole Counihan (2009), for example, all address food and beverages in single-sited cultural contexts—Belize, Africa, and North America—and explore the internal and external influences wrought upon these places through time. Participant-observation is still the main fieldwork method, but the written accounts bring the voices of community members to the fore, while addressing wider current issues and processes that impinge on people's daily lives. Culture, in these later ethnographies, becomes more messy, dynamic, and fraught with contest, disagreements, reconciliations, and strategies, and is articulated differently by members of society. Today's ethnographies explore the experiences of the fieldworker in real time, not some timeless ethnographic present, and the voices of the community members offer a dialogue with the anthropologist, making explicit how the research questions and findings are formulated. These ethnographies shed light on the daily experiences of ordinary people, how we make our living, how we make sense of our existence, and how we see our future. These are intimate local stories based upon first-hand experience, and they travel globally, but resonate as aspects of the shared human experience.

Participant-observation involves trying to gain an insider's or emic perspective on a culture and simultaneously apply an outsider's or etic perspective to draw wider conclusions about how the culture and society works. All social anthropologists work within a **code of ethical practice** to ensure their participants are not compromised by the research, and agreements must be reached to protect people's rights to anonymity, to determine copyright and royalties, fair return for assistance, and to actively involve the community in the research (see AAA 2012). Ultimately, however, the research will reflect the social anthropologist's understandings, and will be situated within the discipline's contribution to knowledge.

Participant-observation involves everyday tasks, such as helping with food getting, preparing ingredients, cooking, cleaning—anything that is offered and asked of the fieldworker. These hands-on activities, in relation to food, are essential for learning a culinary tradition, and call upon all the fieldworker's senses to truly try to share and understand its outcome. As will be discussed in a later chapter on cooking, it is the experience of cooking, of learning the feel, smell, and taste, of food that is essential, and similarly it is the experience of fieldwork that provides a unique opportunity to learn about culture (see Adapon 2008). Fieldwork is accompanied by a wide-range of other research methods, such as interviews (both informal and more focused) with as broad a cross-section of the community as possible. Part of the interviews can involve construction of kinship charts, or genealogies, which are helpful to understand how social roles are played out through kinship relationships. When researching food sharing, such as meals and

feasting, genealogies will help explain the allocations of tasks and the exercise of gastro-politics. Life histories constructed around food have proven to be an effective means of tracking how food traditions are learned and shared across generations, and how new foods are viewed and incorporated into cuisines. These insightful personal reflections on food usually bring to life the social life of food and people's engagement with it, such as memories of cooking and eating (see Counihan 1988; 2009; Macbeth and MacClancy 2004; Miller and Deutsch 2009). Together with the commentary of specific people, the public discourse of a community will be heard by the fieldworker. The public discourse is shared conversation broadcast across the community through intimate conversations, speeches, newspapers, radio, television, and other forms of public media, which enters into individuals' conversations, provides facts and specialized knowledge, and informs their understanding of the world. It is a challenge for any fieldworker to make sense of this disparate knowledge and understanding, and to recognize how it guides action and simultaneously is changed by nonconformist action. The discourse surrounding food will involve the fieldworker identifying among the many ways people talk about food—the cultural classifications of food, the religious and status meanings and values assigned to foodstuffs and their consumption, and taste preferences and distaste, and it will reveal how it is understood and its relationship to life. Through the compilation of the insiders' perspectives on food, the fieldworker will become aware of the gaps between what people say they do, the ideal constructs of their culture, and how this knowledge and understanding is put into practice—the messy, lived reality of culture. This is where the insight into culture and society lies, in the understanding that comes from participating, stepping within the culture, and observing, stepping back and assessing from a wider perspective. This involves another aspect of the ethnographic method—**comparison**, which allows higher-level generalizations to be drawn and tested—or, as Malinowski (1966, 9) argued, it brings order to what could be chaos. Comparisons can be made between different members of society, such as by age and gender, and between different cultural or ethnic groups, between different places, and between different times. It allows broader patterns and associations to be highlighted, and this will be apparent throughout this book.

An abiding principle present in the back of social anthropologists' minds as they do fieldwork, writing, and public engagement is **cultural relativism**. Its hallmark is objectivity, which is imperative when trying to understand cultural traditions that can be unfamiliar, and it demands a suspension of judgment while trying to ascertain what cultural practices mean to the members of a culture themselves, to understand them in that particular context. The examination of food requires cultural relativism be maintained and the range of foodstuffs, methods of acquisition, preparation, and distribution be understood within the broader assignment of cultural meanings and values. This extends into addressing people's relationship with the environment, and attitudes toward current and

future food sources. While the act of eating meat, songbirds, sea turtles, genetically modified organisms, chicken nuggets, insects, and other foodstuffs could be open to the suspension of cultural relativism, depending upon the observer's biases, they must first be approached from a culturally relative position. The examination of any culture's food traditions will raise questions about access to food, denial of food, global food insecurity and anxiety, and the future consequences of intensification. All of these issues, and more, are a consequence of many processes that have now moved far beyond the local and involved all consumers of food in the current global food system, but they must be approached objectively, from a culturally relativist standpoint, and then an informed critique may be offered. For example, a theme that is explored throughout the book is the changing nature of our relationship with food, and by extension the natural environment. Humanity has witnessed a shift away from self-sufficient production of food to many people becoming dependent consumers of food, and consequently the related distance between sites of production and consumption has lengthened. This has brought about dietary change—a new Western-style **industrial cuisine**—that is becoming noticeable everywhere, often characterized by a greater desire for meat, sugar, salt, and fat, catered to by the food industry and its technologically oriented use of the environment. It is important to objectively understand how this transformation occurred and what its consequences are; to examine the local responses to the globalization of food; and then to weigh up our future options. This transition has become part of the worldwide public discourse on food, sometimes addressed optimistically, in that we are capable of producing prodigious quantities of food. From a more pessimistic position, the long-term changes are taking a toll on the environment, and while we produce more food today, we are witnessing greater hunger in all societies than ever before. Through making spatial and temporal comparisons and applying cultural relativism, we are able to offer insight into the challenges we face and possible solutions to our shared need for adequate and acceptable food. This approach highlights the importance of local responses to the global food system and their ability to reinvigorate and maintain distinct cultural identities through food, the evidence of which is drawn from a new form of fieldwork, born of our global realities.

The once standard single-sited fieldwork is increasingly augmented by **multi-sited fieldwork**, which attempts to capture the inclusion of world societies in the **global system**. This type of fieldwork, still reliant on participant-observation, examines “the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in a diffuse time-space” (Marcus 1995, 96). The travels of things across space and time have provided an opportunity to track their production and consumption, following Igor Kopytoff's (1986) method of illuminating their cultural biographies. Food biographies follow commodity chains and are transparent in their holistic approach, revealing how the lives of everyone along the route are linked (Bestor 2001; 2005; Barndt 2002; Cook 2004; Fischer and Benson 2006; Hergesheimer

and Wittman 2012). For instance, the pioneering approach of Mintz (1985) addressed the significance of sugar in British society and located it within the political and economic expansion of the Empire. Following these ideas, the movement of ingredients and the culinary artifacts of cuisines—their representative dishes, such as curry—are an important part of this book's approach to understanding food's meaning through time and in different contexts.

Food is always locally consumed, even if it has travelled long distances to be prepared and shared, making the locality of consumption an important site of study—this is where meaning and value is assigned to food and it is incorporated into the lives of ordinary settled people. It is this intersection of the global food provisioning system with the local culinary knowledge of societies that is significant in the work of food anthropologists today. While everyone lives locally, increasingly people are thinking, acting, and imagining themselves globally, a tension that is present in everyday acts, such as following news stories and selecting foods. This global awareness is fed by the long-distance connectivity of exchanges of goods and knowledge, and by the movement of people. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, beginning in the late 1980s, explored how globalization can be imagined from an academic point of view, but also as part of **public imaginaries**, the shared imagining of the social world derived from public discourse, stories, memories, experiences, and context (Appadurai 2008; Inglis and Gimlin 2009). Appadurai's approach to globalization provides a useful model of the intricacies of the global system as interconnected through a series of overlapping and complex "scapes." The use of the -scapes suffix references the tradition of landscape paintings as artificial imaginings of the intricacies of nature. Appadurai is acknowledging that his "scapes" are representations of globalization, through which we can bring some order to its vast complexity. These involve the flows or movements of people (ethnoscapes), money (financescapes), tools or technology (technoscapes), entertainment, images, and news (mediascapes), and ideas (ideoscapes), as well as ideologies of political and economic processes (Appadurai 2008, 33). Within these flows are many actors—from transnational corporations, nation-states, indigenous peoples, ethnic groups, diaspora ethnic groups, affinity groups, communities, down to the individual, with all asserting some form of agency within the system. The concept extends Anderson's (2006) notion of the **imagined community**, whereby members of even small communities cannot know everyone, but through experience of the few, they come to imagine everyone doing and thinking in a similar fashion to themselves, and this can be extended to the world community (Anderson 2006, 6; Appadurai 2008, 33). At each location people imagine their world based upon the historical, economic, political, and cultural circumstances of their viewpoint. This useful and influential concept allows us to think through the global linkages and to look at the local manifestations of the global. By combining Marcus's call for multi-sited ethnography with Appadurai's concept of

simultaneous but distinct imagining of the global system by people around the world, many insightful studies are adding to our understanding of the local culinary outcomes of the global system (Cook and Crang 1996; James 1996; Duruz 2000; Ferrero 2002; Turgeon and Pastinelli 2002; Watson 2006; Beriss and Sutton 2007). It is also possible to extend the concept to include **foodscapes**, which addresses the flow of ingredients and cuisines across the globe, and their local presence. Ingredients circulate, challenging the existence of seasons, moving from distant sites of production to be domesticated, localized, and consumed elsewhere. Similarly, cuisines, such as Mexican, Indian, Moroccan, and French, are de-territorialized and present across the globe in many forms—in public venues, including restaurants, takeaways, retail home-cooking products, recipes, cooking shows; and in private, such as the homes of members of the ethnic groups, or part of the culinary repertoire of non-members. This concept also captures the transnational food traditions, such as industrial cuisine, which transcends cultural boundaries and instead is representative of corporate culture. Foodscapes parallel the ethnoscape flows of migrants, refugees, and tourists; the financescapes of the food industry; and the mediascape streaming the global food discourse about what to eat and the latest trends in dining. Each foodscape site is linked, but local manifestations are played out according to strategies of resistance, accommodation, and invention, and are employed according to the identity of the producer and consumer (Ferrero 2002). Foodscapes extend the idea of cuisine into the landscape, and include its manifestations in the spaces of consumption, such as homes and commercial prepared food vendors, and into the spaces of retail, from food shops to markets (Caldwell 2009, 105). Within the culinary sites across the global landscape people are exposed to, and engage with, foods and eating practices that are their own or others, all the while investing these everyday experiences with meaning. The outcomes that are explored in this book call into question the prediction that globalization would homogenize the world's food culture through industrial commodification, and instead reveal people's ability to de-commodify food and invest it with local significance. It becomes apparent that globalization is equally capable of maintaining and creating cultural heterogeneity or diversity because it brings a defense of the local, the creative invention of tradition, blending old and new ideas, things, and practices (Appadurai [1996] 2008, 146; James 1996, 82; Wilk 1999; 2002; 2006).

A THEORETICAL TRIFLE

As with any discipline, social anthropology has spawned many theoretical approaches, each building upon the previous questions posed and generating new answers when examining cultures and society in general, or specific aspects of people's lives, such as

religion, art, kinship, or exchange. Theoretical approaches can be understood as the tools or cutlery used to extract intellectual sustenance—knowledge and understanding from a fieldwork study, here focusing on food. All social anthropologists do share the discipline's cultural tradition—its basic principles and methods, outlined above—but they also bring ideas derived from their own experiences, such as where they trained and where they have done fieldwork, and to some degree what caught their attention, fired their imagination, and provoked questions. Since the 1980s, when postmodernism sparked a re-evaluation of the objective empiricism of modernism, many disciplines have witnessed a spectacularly creative period of research that has challenged old assumptions, ignited new questions, and democratized the compilation of knowledge. The anthropology of food is no exception to this trend, and while we can benefit from the findings of previous theoretical approaches, we can also enjoy the postmodern freedom from theoretical pigeonholing and welcome the ability to combine many perspectives to the task at hand. To bring some insight into the important role of theory, we can focus upon a type of food, the trifle, and consider the questions that could be posed by anthropologists. The **trifle** is a classic dessert of British cuisine; it is made from layers of biscuit or sponge cakes, soaked in alcohol, covered in fruit, sometimes jelly, custard, and topped with whipped cream sprinkled with almonds, chocolate shavings, or angelica. Upon the trifle the anthropological theoretical eyes can feast, offering new perspectives, entering into the academic discussion of food. We can approach this discussion as an imaginary symposium of anthropologists who have gathered to discuss the trifle. As with every academic gathering, not everyone who has contributed to the anthropology of food can attend, but some of the major voices serve to introduce the range of approaches and set the table for subsequent encounters throughout the book.

We can imagine a room filled with eminent academics (some very much alive and others long dead but reanimated for this occasion), each holding a spoon, ready to collect and eat an individual serving of trifle. First to venture over to the table is Franz **Boas**, the oldest, and now long dead, early pioneer of anthropology in North America. He would approach the trifle as a particular artifact, created by historical circumstances and worthy of recording in its every detail, including its recipe, manner of construction, mythological connotations, and linguistic affiliations, to preserve a record in case the trifle was lost through assimilation. Following close behind Boas, Bronislaw **Malinowski** would call attention to the details of its appearance, but he would also be interested in observing the scene, noting who else is appraising the trifle, and then asking the participants what they understood of the trifle. Being the arch-ethnographer, Malinowski would be interested in the social life surrounding the trifle, questioning the manifest function of the gathering to elucidate the meaning of the trifle, while the outsider's perspective would elucidate the latent functions, such as a competitive ranking of the theoretical traditions. Meanwhile,



FIGURE 0.2

Trifles: Homemade trifles, featuring sponge cake, fruit, sherry, custard, whipped cream, and chopped pistachio nuts.

Claude **Levi-Strauss** would brush off the functionality of the trifle by musing on its potential to reveal the deeper structures of human thought, to communicate fundamental oppositions of culture versus nature. He would be intrigued by the challenge of reconciling its ingredients to his culinary triangle of raw/cooked/rotten. To help him elaborate his grand theory, he would turn to Mary **Douglas** to request her thoughts on the food rules and the trifle's potential for boundary creation, perhaps through its ingredients. Douglas, however, would be horrified that a dessert was presented as the only food to eat, breaking the accepted pattern of a meal. She would also consider this eating event, as a social field of action, as indicative of the rules of inclusion being played out, allowing Marshall **Sahlins** to agree with her as they begin to discuss reciprocity, social distance, and the exchange of food to create social ties. As Douglas and Sahlins begin to eat the trifle they broach the issue of meaning, with Sahlins asserting that British cultural logic would assign value and meaning to the trifle, classifying it as a celebratory dessert with class associations. On overhearing the discussion of meaning, Clifford **Geertz** would interject that the trifle he holds is deeply layered with thick meaning and that the task at hand is to interpret its webs of significance. As Geertz declares his interpretive intensions, a more scientific approach would be offered across the table by Ellen **Messer** and Andrea **Wiley**, who are both examining the trifle from the point of view of ingredients and their dietary significance. Their discussion draws the gathering's attention to the biological qualities

of food and eating, still within cultural contexts, but mindful of nutrition, malnutrition, and the social dynamics of access to adequate food. Listening closely is Marvin **Harris**, who has been musing aloud about the trifle's likeness to an infrastructural, structural, and superstructural model of society, with all the layers as distinct but integrated from its important sponge cake base upwards. The trifle and its layers, he adds, to no one in particular, must be understood by the objective outsider, and are ultimately influenced by the environmental or material conditions of its creation.

With the words of Marvin Harris echoing around the room, Arjun **Appadurai** selects his trifle with a smile and pithily begins to explore the gastro-politics of gathering, and moving from these specifics he considers the trifle as a product of modernity, the knowledge of which is part of global flows of ideas, goods, and people. As he eats the trifle, Appadurai engages Jack **Goody** in a historically based account of the origins of the trifle and its social life as a thing, an artifact, through which people have brought meaning to their lives. Goody takes the historical narrative into a cross-cultural assessment of the trifle as simultaneously a product of a differentiated cuisine and of industrialization, allowing the dessert to tell of class, emulation, and societal change played out through food. Nodding his head in agreement, Sidney **Mintz** looks at the sugar content of the trifle and eloquently examines the shaping of the taste for sugar as a consequence of broader political, economic, and social influences linked to colonialism, capitalism, commodity production, and the relations between classes, power, and consumption. From the side, Pierre **Bourdieu** enters the discussion by introducing the trifle as part of individuals' social strategies based on consumption, using objects to demonstrate their taste and claim social distinction. Across the room, Mary Douglas and Marshall Sahlins nod their heads, and many others lean toward Bourdieu as he espouses on the symbolic, social, and cultural capital that can be articulated through the trifle and the gathering. In this instance, as they consume the trifle and talk knowledgeably, the anthropologists are displaying their cultural capital, while the network of affiliations and friendships exposed at this gathering reveals the value of their social capital, and the respectful pattern of listening and commentary illustrates the accrued symbolic capital of the participants. Enthusiastically, Danny **Miller** picks up Bourdieu's comments and situates the trifle into the realm of material culture and mass consumption, and comments that the trifle could be from anywhere, but it is being used locally to animate social relations and construct identity. Importantly, Carole M. **Counihan** points out that the trifle raises questions about gender, such as who produced and served it, and queries where their presence is at the gathering. She sees the trifle as just a starting point to uncover how food is produced, society reproduced, and how change is incorporated through everyday life. James **Watson** and Melissa **Caldwell** echo these sentiments, and wonder about the reception of the trifle as an agent of change, introduced into former colonies as a dessert redolent of British

rule. They pick up Miller's discussion of the importance of local meanings and remind everyone that while the form of the trifle may be identical, its meanings and associations will be contextually located. Johan **Pottier** steps in with a gentle reminder that while the trifle is enjoyed it must never be forgotten that not everyone is lucky enough to have the luxury of eating trifle. He broadens the realities of "let them eat trifle" into the issue of food security, development, hunger, and the consequences of global food production methods. As anthropologists, all are mindful of the harsh realities of the global capitalist system as the backdrop to human society, and Richard **Wilk** draws together the themes of class, colonialism, capitalism, commodification, and food by thoughtfully comparing the trifle to desserts found in Belize (formerly British Honduras) and identifying the trifle as ripe for creolization. With everyone's minds now focused on the warmth of the Belizean sun, and the tropical tastes of its cuisine, David **Sutton** and Jon **Holtzman** wax poetically on the sensuousness of the trifle, its power to conjure memories and ideas, despite its transitory presence as a food to be consumed during a social gathering. This closes the far-from-trifling discussion of the worth of food to uncover the complexities and ambiguities of life and its understanding as generated through anthropology. Each of the theorists mentioned here, and others that are absent, have contributed much more to anthropology than this snackshot allows (see Layton 1997; Salzman 2001; Mintz and Du Bois 2002; Erickson and Murphy 2003). With this brief foray into the role of anthropological theory in understanding food, we can move into thinking more generally about the role of food in anyone's life.

CUISINES

The concept of cuisine has become prominent in the discourse surrounding the contemporary global culinary scene—and as such, any guide to food must engage with this concept and address the processes that have brought it to prominence in people's culinary imagination. Cuisines are not just random assemblages of ingredients and characteristic flavours, but instead are long-term, largely nutritious adaptations that have supported generations through time. They are not occasionally practised; they are everyday, routine, and often unselfconscious cultural acts that are not remarked upon, unless in relation to other people's food and eating habits. This makes cuisines a relational form of cultural marker whose relevance, rather like ethnicity itself, waxes and wanes in intensity depending upon circumstances. While cuisines may appear consistent through time, they will always change as new ingredients and ideas are incorporated, yet they offer an evocative, comforting familiarity to the habitual consumer. Cuisines act as powerful emotive forces that are at the heart of social life, having agency in shaping people and

their social relationships (c.f. Farquhar 2009, 146). They are the culinary expression of any place, being the culmination of the influences of the environment, the food-getting strategy, organization of production through kinship, age, gender, and specialization, the social and political organization, ideology, and the circumstances of history and encounters with other cultures. A cuisine can be defined as *a facet of culture concerned with ideas, beliefs, behaviours, and practices of people in relation to their creation and use of food that is socially and physically sustaining*.

While this is a generalizing category, it does offer a broad pattern upon which people's culinary identity can be explored, while being mindful that the socially conscious idea of cuisine is located within specific social, political, and economic circumstances of nationalism (Appadurai 1988; Cusack 2000). Through the years of anthropological analysis of food the concept of cuisine, and its characteristics, has been a prominent guide to bring order to a vast array of ethnographic facts about food (Farb and Armelagos 1980, 190–91; Rozin and Rozin 1981; Goody 1982; Mintz 1985, 179; Belasco 2008, 16–20; Ray 2008). This book is no exception, with its organization hanging on the characteristics of cuisines, which are detailed in the chapters that follow.

Food has a taken-for-granted quality, one that has not daunted anthropologists from considering its importance, especially since ethnography is notoriously focused on the everyday. Food has proven to be telling, as it is full of meaning and understanding, of ourselves and others. The understanding of food often oscillates between the stomach and brain approaches—the “good to eat” and “good to think”—which actually do capture our basic choice of whether to eat or to speak—since we can easily choke. But our relationship with food is more complex than this dichotomy suggests, with it simultaneously occupying our minds and filling our stomachs, bringing anxiety and comfort. The next chapter addresses how we have been shaped by our relationship with food, both physiologically and socially, and sets the scene for exploring how we culturally construct ideas of edibility and assign meaning and value to food.