Introduction

Food and social change: Culinary elites, contested technologies, food movements and embodied social change in food practices

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Abstract

In this introduction, we have asked a very classical sociological question and brought together interdisciplinary efforts to critically approach it, focusing on a basic issue: food. We briefly reconstruct the main approaches to social change in sociological theory and then identify main themes with which food studies have contributed to this debate. If, to avoid normative and formal approaches, theories of change require contextualization in order to keep their explanatory value, this volume brings historical and geographical context to provide an analysis of social change through the lenses of food. Methodologically, articles offer diverse approaches to food, allowing different kinds of perspectives on change. While statistical analysis or historically comparative sociology will provide correlational snapshots and structural transformations, ethnographies necessarily deal with change happening in the everyday. The articles in this monograph have been organized into four broad groups: (1) national cuisines as elite projects of social change; (2) science and technology as contested tools for social change; (3) social mobilization and food movements as agents of social change; and (4) micro- and macro-level change and beyond: culinary subjectivities, embodied social change and food transition.

Keywords

food, global sociology, social change, sociology of food, theories of change

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What can food practices like eating and cooking, food movements, humanitarian bio-technological interventions and gastro-nationalisms tell us about processes of social change? How food is produced, distributed, signified, prepared, consumed, and wasted is intertwined within broader social, economic, political, cultural and economic dynamics at various levels, from the local to the global. However, such entanglements are often overshadowed by more immediate analysis of food and change. In the past decade, the idea that through food *choices* one can change the world to achieve goals such as environmental sustainability and, to a lesser extent, social justice, has become widespread amongst progressive-minded groups. This is especially true of the younger generation, within middle and upper classes across the Global North and the Global South. The everyday practices of buying food and eating have become increasingly politicized and of interest to policy makers, the food industry and indeed to food research. Market-led social change and the paradigm of instrumental rational individual choice can be an attractive option for those who can engage in those practices as well as for those who benefit from them directly, such as market niches, or indirectly, with the de-responsibilization of politics and market regulation for environmental protection and socioeconomic rights. Although these processes do deserve scholarly attention, from a social sciences perspective, it is necessary to question the dominance of this paradigm choice in research on transformations, in food relations and beyond, situating it within broader debates and schools of thought on social change.

While social practices of the everyday activities of eating and buying food dominate research on broader societal processes and with practical relevance to inform policies and market strategies, sociological theory on social change still remains at a very abstract level, scarcely engaged with empirical research. The only exceptions are studies concerning social revolutions and change at the level of political systems, where change is very clearly identified in the difference between a before and after (Tilly, 1978). Theories of change, as Boudon (1983) understands it, should not rely on universal laws, but be local and partial in order to keep their explanatory value. He highlights the need for contextualization – historical and geographical – to provide an analysis of social change with a solid foundation, serving as an alternative for formal universalistic models of change. It is from this need for a partial, contextualized and empirically-based analysis of social change that *The Sociological Review Monograph* departs. Re-thinking social change through food, as Neuman (2019) pointed out, will not only benefit the field of food studies, but increase the understanding of general social theory, bringing flesh and food for thought to grand, and typically abstract, theorizing on social change.

Rather than claiming novelty or neglect, the topic of social change has been recurrent in the field of food studies and illuminated processes of social transformation across various dimensions, whether these be symbolic, cultural, political or material, in both its socioeconomic and ecological inflections (Murcott, 2013). It includes multiple levels and units of analysis, ranging from bodies and households, to communities, social groups, organizations, and macro-units such as food cultures, national policies and global food trade. Moreover, food research has employed a very broad range of theoretical and methodological tools to investigate social change. Last but not least, scholarship on food often documents the persisting patterns of structural phenomena, such as class and gender inequalities in food consumption. Food studies, as such, do not focus solely on

transformations, but also on continuities, thus providing an excellent field with which to understand social change.

Examining varied strands of social research on processes of social change through the lens of food has served as the motivation for this volume. Together, we understand and are committed to building a global sociology, which demands contributions to social theorizing and research on social change from different geographical and historical contexts, or as Haraway's feminist epistemological stance would have it: from situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988). In this Introduction, we briefly reconstruct the main approaches to social change in sociological theory and then identify principal themes with which food studies have contributed to this debate. In the merging of both, we provide the background necessary to introduce the individual contributions to this monograph.

Social change

Social change is a foundational topic in sociology. The two classical approaches on this topic are divided on the question of whether social change is predictable, irreversible and, ultimately, evolutionist, or if change is more related to social transformations that cannot be predicted and leads to unexpected results. Within this classical analysis, change is understood as linear (as in Tönnies or Durkheim), dialectical (as in Marx) or cyclical (as in Ibn Khaldun). In all cases, however, both the past and the 'new status' are considered as stable and fixed, while what happens during the process that led from one state to the other is considered in terms of conflict, loss, the weakening of social solidarity, or even anomia. The past and the present are seen as entirely distinct. As May (2011, p. 365) has shown, the past is characterized as having 'stable and clearly identifiable social structures that strongly determined individual lives', and was, therefore, more predictable. The present, by contrast, is analysed as uncertain, 'fluid and in the making, and as somewhat chaotic and formless'. Particularly in the current world, the dichotomy of change/stability, as with a 'before and after' picture, should be re-thought as change while in movement, in order to maintain the relevance of a sociological analysis. Adams (1996) criticizes the retrospectively-established dualism of these structurally-oriented theories, which, in some sense, overlooked the messy processes which lead into social change.

In the *longue durée*, social change is either conceived as a movement from one stage to another, or as part of an ongoing process – one which has accelerating moments and which could, eventually, be reified. Change is understood as structural, and permanent transformations occur in institutions, norms, values and representations along history. It is therefore explained either by the structure that changes or the conditions and factors that cause this change (Khondker & Schuerkens, 2014, p. 4). Change as a process is hard to grasp in the *short durée*, but it does affect individual lives. Social change may be observed, then, as gradual modifications over a period of time (Khondker & Schuerkens, 2014).

As Cardoso (1987, p. 178) has indicated, post-classical sociologists have tended to focus on the 'transformational action of active social agents in processes of interaction . . . , rather than on action at the level of structures', therefore providing a series of theories of change, instead of a unique grand theory. Boudon (1986), for instance, highlights the need to provide historical and geographical context, to elaborate on an analysis with a solid foundation, instead of referring to formal universalistic models of change.

Theories of change, in Boudon's (1983) understanding, should not rely on universal laws, but be local and partial in order to keep their explanatory value (for a detailed discussion of theories of social change, see Haferkamp & Smelser, 1992).

Within the question of social change, modernity (in its various definitions, critiques and derivations) has been a key topic that guided the debate, generally including a normative approach. From this perspective, change is considered as part of the expected reproduction of the system (Cadwallader, 1958) and is paired with a number of processes considered characteristic of modernity, such as secularization, individualization, industrialization, urbanization, development and globalization. Social change in terms of modernization and development has been a recurrent topic, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, allowing us to discuss, explain or even demand social change (Rogers, 1971; for a summarized discussion of this topic, see Khondker & Schuerkens, 2014). Theoretical and methodological problems and shortcomings of pairing change and development and modernization have been widely debated (for instance, in a number of essays in Haferkamp & Smelser's 1992 volume). Kimmel and McDaniel (1979, p. 341) also state that among the flaws of modernization theory, we find the creation of the modern/traditional dichotomy (a recurrent topic when food and identity or 'authenticity' are analysed) where modern (and therefore, dynamic, developed) is defined by the Western experience, while the traditional is a residual category, understood as static, consensual and insignificant to social change. Modernization theory assumes that, independently of being a result of structural differentiation or cultural diffusion, economic development leads to the political modernization of society (Kimmel & McDaniel, 1979, p. 341).

Methodologically, approaches to change vary from comparative historical perspectives, to purely theoretical models, allowing different kinds of perspectives on change. While a research design that privileges statistical analysis or historically comparative sociology will provide correlational snapshots and structural transformations, ethnographies necessarily deal with processes that happen in the everyday, allowing us to view 'social change not simply as a top-down process generated by "extraordinary" events but as something that also results from our mundane "ordinary" activities' (May, 2011, p. 367).

The articles in this monograph have been organized into four broad groups: (1) national cuisines as elite projects of social change; (2) science and technology as contested tools for social change; (3) social mobilization and food movements as agents of social change; and (4) micro- and macro-level change and beyond: culinary subjectivities, embodied social change and food transition.

Building national cuisines: Elite projects of social change

Food has been a fruitful vehicle in varied top-down projects of social change, both in material and symbolic terms. In material terms, access to food has been a key arena of political intervention, considering that the majority of the world's population has been food insecure for the better part of history, and a significant portion continues to be so, or is becoming so, in pandemic times. Since the mercantile period of statehood in Europe, populations have been governed – as has been reconstructed in the Foucauldian history of governance – with a focus on increasing human fertility and reducing mortality and morbidity. Increasing concerns over a healthy army or an economically-active population determined state

interventions in food policies for regulating food safety, public research in plant science, agronomic technical assistance, the so-called Green Revolution, and state-led land reforms (often a reaction to social upheavals and peasant struggles). Most of them have been top-down projects, sponsored by elite networks between state bureaucracies, the food industry, landed elites and scientists, and justified under the motto of feeding populations. In symbolic terms, building a national cuisine has also been a project led by elites in nation-building processes, observed in varied contexts, from European aristocracies to postcolonial states, also becoming part of state-led projects of modernization.

Two articles in this monograph deal with very different contexts in which a national cuisine is in the making, and while the contrast of these cases illuminates how nation-cuisine building could be based on different ideas of the nation, they also reinforce the powerful role food gains today both in the multilayered process of social change, and in reifying ideologies of ancestry, authenticity and stability.

Raúl Matta's article 'Food for social change in Peru: Narrative and performance of the culinary nation' brings a solid critical literature review on the rise of Peruvian cuisine and Peru's gastro-politics. Matta describes how food became the central element in Peru's national project, both as a reason to create unity by pride, and because it gives the country positive visibility, turning Peru into 'a gastronomic mecca' and in so doing, bringing both economic benefits and leading to social reconciliation in a nation shaped by inequalities of race, class and gender. Exploring public discourse, media content, gastronomic trends and restaurant sourcing, Matta's article analyses how food could help to heal and re-found the nation in the last decade, after a period of decline and terror. His article also provides a critical view of the 'gastronomic revolution', reformulating ideas of social change aimed at shaping and promoting Peru as not just an entrepreneurial, vigorous country, but a more equal and fair society. By discussing the changing contexts behind this so-called revolution, and 'the cultural work through which chefs "elevate" indigenous and formerly disregarded foods from cookery to gastronomy and from local to global', Matta indicates how the incorporation of indigenous people and their food cultures helped to mitigate the country's inequalities and reinforce the claims to unity and reconciliation.

Matta analyses the central processes of the Peruvian national culinary project, including high-end cuisine, the refiguring of indigenous people as producers and the use of cultural identity as an authenticating force in three stages: first, he focuses on the early stage of food's shift from culinary to cultural and political object; he then analyses the formulation of Peruvian cuisine 'as a development engine loaded with attractive cultural diversity', which was made possible by elite's ability both to commodify local food and make it suitable for a competitive culinary market and to include peasants as partners in this endeavour. Finally, Matta points to the moment of national (culinary) re-founding, by analysing the national narrative around the concept of *mestizaje*, and how it combines a promise of reconciliation and unity and one of progress and development.

Peruvian cuisine can appeal to its indigenous population's ancestral past, that is, a rich ecological biodiversity with a complex postcolonial culinary history that combines immigration from various parts of Europe, Asia and Africa. One would be hard-pressed to find similar narratives in the case of the United Arab Emirates analysed by Eloísa Martín. While the Bedouin traditions are constructed as cultural heritage, Martín shows

the complicated negotiations enacted to invent a national cuisine in a country that imports 90% of the food it consumes and, at least in the official discourse, actively prevents any kind of melting pot, culinary or otherwise.

In her article 'Nation building and social change in the United Arab Emirates through the invention of Emirati cuisine', Martín analyses how the invention of a national cuisine takes up part of the journey of building the nation, both as a metaphor and as performance of larger political, economical and ideological processes. The UAE was formed 50 years ago and is, since then, going through a rapid process of social change and ongoing process of nation building, where local food plays an important role. Her ethnographic-based research provides this article with the 'authorized voices' of the national cuisines: chefs and professional cooks that work with what today is called Emirati food, who are also closely related to governmental institutions.

Nation building could be analysed as a multidimensional project, where food is appropriated and re-signified to discursively contribute to it but, as Martín shows, food's role is not just symbolic: it has a performative role in the process, and it is affected by other processes related to the construction of the nation and its economical development. Martín's article describes how food both participates in, and tells the story of, nation building in the UAE, through three overlapping stages of development: traditional, modern and fusion food. She also explains how Emirati food helps to create identity borders, by defining who is allowed to taste the authentic flavours, through practices of commensality and reflective discourses and practices of national belonging.

As in other national cases, the process of establishing a national cuisine is not linear or coherent, and both Martín and Matta attest to this in their articles. In the Emirati case, Martín explores how ingredients and cooking techniques are shared with other countries in the Gulf, but are also imported from India or Iran, creating a cuisine that, in the official discourse, distances itself from other Middle Eastern or even Arabic countries. At the same time, Martín explains, the UAE is a country were the Emirati citizens comprise only 10% of the population, and the country hosts more than 200 nationalities (and almost all of their cuisines). Therefore, the process of nation building, the definition of identity and citizenship, and the very invention of the national cuisine is, in a sense, the exact opposite of the *mestizaje* that Matta analyses in his article. There is a clear division, in discourses and in practices of commensality, of who is and who is not allowed to test the authentic flavours of Emirati food. A reading in tandem of both articles allows us to observe the importance of including food and cuisine as part of any analysis of social change and the nation, as well as of the politics of identity and the borders (and limits) of national belonging.

Science and technology as contested tools for social change

A key component of the modernization approaches towards social change is the application of scientific knowledge through new technologies in economic activities and production processes. As critical theories have long stressed, science and technology function as ideologies for projects of social change, and have gained increased legitimacy in political discourses and public policies during the twentieth century. Along with, and in relation to processes of urbanization and industrialization, the increased application of new technologies in agrarian production, food transport, food preservation, food

industrialization and food marketing is considered a key component in the process of modernization of food systems (Beardsworth & Keil, 1996; Goody, 1982). One of the most controversial applications of technology in food production is biotechnology, which has been on the market for decades now. Biotechnology has not yet managed to gain public legitimacy, despite supporting claims and promises of being a pro-poor, sustainable technology, which would mitigate environmental effects or could enhance quality of products. Two articles in this monograph exemplify both facets of this conundrum: one on the hopes of biotechnology as a solution to micronutrient deficiencies amongst women and children in Uganda through the biofortification of bananas; the other on civil society organizations, in particular, from alternative food networks, challenging safety claims about the environmental risks of imported genetically modified rapeseed in Japan.

In 'Food as medicine: Making 'better bananas' in Uganda', Sandra Calkins explores the potential of food to promote or hinder social change through the question of what makes a 'good banana' in different valuations, moving from global public health philanthropic strategies that rely on plant science and nutritional science and redefine food as cost-effective medicines, to everyday understandings of food cultures on the ground. Based on ethnographic research, Calkins has interviewed molecular biologists, physicians and ordinary people to understand what makes a good banana for them. To navigate between these worlds of worth, she sustains the need for a middle ground between praxeological and structuralist-culturalist approaches to food. Calkins cautions against the dangers of praxeological food research inadvertently lending support for agendas of engineering social change from above, as this highlights a 'quality turn', in which the possibility of changing meanings and values is achieved through practices that explore the sensory and aesthetic dimensions of food. 'To approach the valuation of food performatively and as something that is easily manipulable tends to background long-standing affective attachments and culturally-acquired tastes for particular foods', she argues, defending the use of culturalist-structuralist approaches. This might better explain how ideologies that frame food as medicine do not gain popularity on the ground, in which *matooke* bananas are attached to family traditions, sensory qualities and meanings such as fertility, abundance, life and connection.

Calkins sees, nevertheless, that GM bananas might open new ways to (re-)connect health to interspecies entanglements and ecological futures, with prospects to bring a broader range of factors to be considered when facing hunger. The fact that hunger and malnutrition due to food insecurity remain chronic social problems in Uganda, despite decades-long policies, is not a paradox. Calkins's case study is another instance of depoliticization of hunger that converges with Escobar's (2011) analyses of the discourses, policies and dispositifs behind fighting hunger and promoting development in Latin America. Discourses and policies change in their technical-managerial, compartmentalized treatment and are easier to tackle than a problem that has multiple causes, including poverty and the political economy of food. Focusing on deficient diets and biofortification does not address the long-standing knowledge and claims from civil society organizations that the right to food involves permanent access to food in quantity and quality, food that is diverse and culturally appropriate, that respects what people understand as food. Civil society has been disputing the meanings of food and the safety of the application of scientific knowledge and technology to food, and also relies on scientific evidence to challenge the safety.

In her article, 'Citizen science and social movements: A case of participatory monitoring of genetically modified crops in Japan', Aya H. Kimura discusses the use of citizen science, that is, the gathering of scientific data by lay people aimed at filling gaps of undone science over health and environmental effects of certain technologies. While the main goal behind this strategy on the part of social movements is to challenge the political process behind the approval of new technologies based on safety claims from scientific authority, Kimura claims that citizen data can fulfil purposes other than that. In the Japanese alternative food network, a narrow reading of social movement success based on declared goals of strategies would indicate that, after almost two decades of gathering data showing the environmental contamination due to genetic flux of GM rapeseed, the movement had failed to change safety claims about this product. However, Kimura argues that this strategy has provided the means to recruit new members, to raise public awareness about the risks from GM plants, as well as political awareness and a space to talk about food, health and environmental issues in general, and to establish and maintain long years of solidarity and collaboration between various civil society organizations within Japanese alternative food networks. In order to explore these manifold purposes of citizen science and its heterogeneous pathways in relation to social movements, Kimura proposes an analytical framework that is multi-actor, process oriented and long-term. According to this, citizen science takes place at the intersections between civil society, state, science and the market.

Based on feminist and postcolonial perspectives on science and technology, Kimura calls attention to the gendered, racialized and colonial legacies of mainstream science and the situatedness of any knowledge. She considers that citizen science is not only about collecting data but, as a strategy aiming at social change, involves a combination with many other repertoires of contention, a nomenclature dear to social movement scholarship. Considering citizen science as a repertoire of contention, it can involve very diverse practices, which evolve over time, and in relation to other activists' strategies. In the case of monitoring environmental contamination of GM rapeseed in Japan, Kimura argues that citizen science engages a series of organizations such as consumer cooperatives, peasant movements, national anti-GM networks and local anti-GM organizations, and such a collaborative process is generative of an alternative food network in Japan.

Similarly to Calkins's case study, the meanings of good food on the ground in Japan blurs disciplinary boundaries of natural sciences and social sciences, bringing cultural understandings to analysis of environmental risk and situating scientific controversies within webs of culture–nature relations. Regarding food and social change, Kimura's article counterbalances narrow conceptions of change to measure the actions of social movements, providing an 'account for diverse outcomes and pathways for social change'. For her, citizen science 'is not just a means to the ends (data), but . . . a process of engagement with different actors'. This situates the scholarship of social movements as an agent of change in food studies (see next section) within broader understandings of social action beyond the strategic, rational-choice framework, and as social actors that are part of meaning-making and long-term cultural change, including processes of building subjectivities and identities. Kimura's article is rather situated in the intersection between two sections of this monograph and serves as a good transition to the next group of articles, namely, on the role of social mobilization as agents of change.

Social mobilization and food movements as agents of change

Articles in this section draw on social mobilization over food from world regions that do not neatly fit in the accounts of literature of food movements, mostly based on the experiences of the Global North. Cases from China and Latin America, particularly in Brazil, are analysed, and pose relevant questions for this scholarship. For instance, in their programmatic article for a feminist food studies agenda, Sachs and Patel-Campillo (2014) claimed that while there is a large involvement of women in food movements, there is, paradoxically, an absence of a feminist awareness within them. This might be true for the USA or Europe, but not for Latin America, where popular feminisms have articulated gender justice and food sovereignty agendas (Conway, 2018; Masson et al., 2017). Studying the Good Food Movement in China, Joy Zhang asks 'How can we break away from a fixation on top-down power dynamics and track the impact of social movement in societies that do not easily fit with Western neoliberal theorisations?' She draws on Foucauldian perspectives on resistance and agency to argue that social mobilization over food can offer a realm in which social change can be achieved by creating social space that does not excessively challenge much power, and yet is powerful in transforming the everyday lives of many Chinese urbanites and farmers. Building knowledge about transformations in the global food systems spearheaded by social movements is a challenge to be tackled as an ongoing collective agenda that brings different experiences from across the globe and that clearly goes far beyond the possibilities of this monograph. Nevertheless, we indicate fruitful exchanges that arise as we start a conversation between Chinese local food networks, Brazilian rural working women, and Japanese citizen scientists.

Renata Motta's article 'Social movements as agents of change: Fighting intersectional food inequalities, building food as webs of life' introduces this section on the role of social movements and food initiatives in processes of social change by identifying injustices and dynamics of inequalities in the food system while actively engaged in transforming them. Peasant movements, alternative food networks, feminist food sovereignty alliances, food justice movements, agroecological movements and supporters of veganism have been struggling for a fair and ecological food system, which Motta combines under the umbrella term of 'food movements'. These movements focus on specific axes of injustice, sometimes thematizing intersecting inequalities and building alliances and solidarities. Motta brings together diverse strands of activism and research under the concept of food inequalities, as an intersectional analytical tool to make sense of different axes and dimensions of inequalities. In order to retain intersectionality's conceptual strength, as grounded in feminist epistemologies and political commitments to social change, she suggests that the concept of food inequalities should also serve as a guide to assess exclusions and potentials for solidarity-building across different movements. In addition to concept building, Motta's article aims to contribute to decentring food studies towards a global sociology of food, and to bring together studies from the Global North and the Global South, by reviewing works published in English, Spanish and Portuguese, and engaging in debates from Latin America, with a stronger focus on Brazil.

'Food movements, agrifood systems, and social change at the level of the national state: The Brazilian *Marcha das Margaridas*', by Aline Borghoff Maia and Marco

Antonio Teixeira, makes a much-needed contribution to scholarship on social mobilizations over food: the case of a feminist women's movement that addresses structural gender inequalities in the agrifood system. The *Marcha das Margaridas* is a collective women-led action within rural trade unions in alliance with other agrarian movements, feminist organizations, environmental networks and black rural movements. Since 2000, it has taken between 20,000 and 100,000 women to the streets in Brasilia. In their fight for gender justice in Brazil, the Marcha das Margaridas clearly targets the national state and the need for policies that are, ideally, not gender-blind. Borghoff and Teixeira further innovate in research on transformations in agrifood systems with their choice to analyse how social movements target the national sphere, and how this intertwines at global and local scales. Their theoretical discussion challenges the approach of dichotomous scales by providing categories and perspectives that highlight the relational and interdependent character in the multi-scalarity of food movements. Their research draws on primary source documents, interviews with the Marcha's activists, and observant participation in the Marcha's organization and execution in 2015, and 2019. Borghoff and Teixeira see the counter-hegemonic nature and multi-scalar relationalities of women's productive yards (household gardens), for instance, by connecting local knowledge over creole seeds to resistance against corporate concentration within the global seed industry.

Their article contributes to a much-needed understanding of the scales of transformation toward a fairer and ecological food system, showing the entanglements of change taking place at the local, national and global scales. It highlights the importance of analysing social movements as agents of change in food relations, in particular in one aspect of the agrifood system that seems so slow to transform, namely, the dimension of gendered inequalities. Through their transnational networks, the Marcha das Margaridas is an isolated example of the power of mobilized rural women in changing their life conditions and consequently, food relations. In a very different context, the next article captures processes of social change that are predominantly neglected in scholarship on food and social mobilization.

In '(Bio)politics of existence and social change: Insights from the Good Food Movement', Joy Y. Zhang examines state–society relations in an authoritarian context that greatly differs from dominant understandings on how social movements should target the state and covet the attention of authorities. Zhang analyses three initiatives within the alternative food network known as the 'Good Food Movement' in China: the Wuhan-based *Natur*, the Beijing Country Fair and Xi'an Farmers' Markets through fieldwork and focus groups. Shifting away from the ambiguous results of grassroots movements in bringing change in China, as the latter fear being seen as challengers to the government's intolerance to opposition, Zhang contents that new conceptual tools are necessary to understand the logics and impacts of social movements in contexts in which Western frameworks do not hold, such as East Asian societies.

Based on a Foucauldian theory of governance, Zhang suggests the concept 'biopolitics of existence', which involves not only life necessities or the 'corporeal' needs of survival but also a qualified life, that is, a social-political dimension: the freedom to exist as civil society and occupy a social-political space; the capacity for agency and to (self-) develop in interaction with others. She claims that this concept broadens Foucauldian

analysis of self-care from an individual subject to explore the collective search for a good life in a socio-political body or organization. The need to maintain a collective existence involves adapting to new circumstances, in continuous experimentation, which can be sources of social innovation. This offers a contextualized understanding of social change, taking into account how actors calculate their strategies within a particular political ecology. In this case, this means that 'both civil actors and Chinese authorities recognize that governing objectives are not necessarily best achieved through coercive or antagonist struggles but are better achieved through strategies that allow them to draw from or bounce off existing material and structural contexts'.

In a context of Chinese government-led agricultural reform to develop a competitive modern food system and a number of food scandals, alternative food networks establishing direct links between consumers and farmers emerged in China. These have been described as 'self-redemption' by the media, including a self-defence dimension, and a proactive side of creating alternatives to the hegemonic food systems. Given the unfavourable context for demanding rights, the activists defend agency through inviting all to assume responsibility for changing their behaviour and thus influencing the behaviour of others. Though one might interpret this as a discourse of neoliberal subjectivities and the devolution of responsibility to individuals, given the context of Chinese authoritarianism, it does, in fact, involve a different type of social change. In the Chinese case, food relations allow the creation of social space that transforms the individual as well as socio-political lives, which cannot be taken for granted.

Micro- and macro-level change and beyond: Culinary subjectivities, embodied social change and food transition

The three articles in this section show very different perspectives in how to analyse social change, starting from the micro-level of individual life-courses and in networks of commensality, such as family or a local restaurant. The second article draws on Bourdieu's concept of habitus to grasp how structure and agency are mediated through embodied practices at the individual level. The third and final article discusses macro-scale social change in transition theories related to food. With this triad, we have represented all three levels of analysis to social change, with each complementing the other. As discussed earlier, social theories of social change often focus on the macro-level of structural change, but this level of analysis presents serious limitations for understanding how these transformations have actually taken place in the individual's life-course.

Cultural change in food practices also occurs as an emergent phenomenon, resulting from a myriad of changes at the micro, individual level. Though this is not necessarily related to involvement in social movements, it may still be influenced by their messages and values. In 'Commensality: Networks of personal, family and community social transformation', Meredith Abarca describes how food practices can be a realm of change within the life-course of individuals, who actively and intentionally re-think their relations to food by reshaping what she calls 'culinary subjectivities'. Through three food-centred oral stories of Latinx migrants in the USA, Abarca analyses transformations in how they relate to food and to others through cooking, suggesting three levels of change: at the personal, the familiar and the community levels.

Abarca aims to connect three issues: first, food and identity, relating individual culinary memories to their cultural identities. Second, how culinary subjectivities form commensalities, to express how food creates social relations, including more-than-human others, such as the four elements (fire, earth, water, air) and spiritual ancestral teachers. The third topic is how commensalities become platforms for broader social change at the personal, familial and communal level. By choosing three stories of individual transformation she shows how change takes place at the level of the senses, memory and the body and how consumption is not resumed to singular experiences but is embodied in historical and social relationships to food.

Abarca's article brings another perspective to Matta's research on the role of indigenous food cultures. She argues that reclaiming indigenous ingredients and foods, individuals with roots in indigenous ethnicities not only decolonize their diets, but affirm 'that part of their culture was never conquered'. In addition, indigenous cosmologies open novel ways to think beyond neomaterialist approaches to posthumanism, as they bring spirituality back to understanding food cultures, reconnecting food studies to culturalist and symbolic approaches. This should not be dismissed too quickly, as Calkins notes in her research on the meanings associated with bananas in Ugandan food cultures. Beyond traditional and modern dichotomies, Abarca's work shows how decolonization of the palate means a resistance to industrial food that has not only contributed to destroying food cultures but also to deteriorating bodies and public health.

Staying with the discussion on embodiment and subjectivities, Judith Ehlert leads us to the other side of the world, Vietnam. Her article 'Food consumption, habitus and the embodiment of social change: Making class and doing gender in urban Vietnam' addresses social positioning and change through the perspective of the eating body, by observing daily practices of food consumption, dieting and working on the body to enact ideal body types.

In a process of rapid change from food insecurity to current enlarged food and lifestyle options, that are reminiscent of the UAE case as analysed by Martín, Vietnamese consumers face contradicting demands to both indulge and restrain themselves. Taking this dynamic urban context as its point of departure and adopting an intersectional perspective, Ehlert shows how eating, dieting and body performance are applied in terms of making class and doing gender. Through her description of the growing urban landscape of food and body-centric industries, she picks up the criticism of Bourdieu's strong class-centrism of habitus, to discuss new possibilities for distinction, dependent not only on economic capital but on bodily-gendered as well as cultural capital. In so doing, Ehlert proposes to start from social practices, bringing gender into the analysis through feminist approaches to social change as embodiment.

Perhaps no field in food studies is more multidisciplinary than theories of transition, in which both natural and social sciences are in long-standing debate. Transition theories have been differently employed in fields such as demography, epidemiology and nutrition to explain the process of macro-scale social change based on large data sets of global populations. Availability of food is a central component in explanations for such changes. Jean-Pierre Poulain's article reviews this literature from a sociological perspective, organizing it according to different conceptions of change and focusing on the role of food in different transition models: demographic, epidemiological, nutritional and protein. He

categorizes three models of social change behind transition theories: (1) the transition model, from one stable state to another, where explanation is centred on the phase in between and on the different rates of change in biological and cultural variables; (2) the stage model, which conceives change as successive stages, explaining the structures and organizations in each of these more or less stable phases; (3) a combination of the two, considering change as an evolutionary movement, but which can also be reversible.

Poulain argues that sociology can make important contributions to such a multidisciplinary research area, by focusing on the concept of food transition, which opens up more avenues for explanations of social change. His article provides four main contributions. The first is to uncover the implicit (positivist) assumptions on which many transitions theories rely, such as Malthusian correlations between food availability and demographic change, evolutionism, linear causality, self-regulation and irreversibility of change. As an illustration of the latter, Poulain states that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown a new stage of return of the great epidemics, a factor that was supposed to be part of the past. The second contribution is to highlight the inequalities between national societies in global undifferentiated accounts of nutritional transitions as well as the inequalities within societies, along with categories such as gender, class and age. These point to hierarchies in both the quantity and quality of foods consumed, and to the need for differentiation between types of food.

Sociological approaches have, thirdly, the tools to question linear causality models in spillover explanatory modes, typical of modernization approaches, according to which socioeconomic factors will be automatically translated into more availability and access to food. However, they cannot explain the changes in the patterns of food consumption with diets that have less nutritional value. We would add that cultural studies of food consumption and the political economy of the food chain are here key to explain changes in consumption patterns such as those leading to the so-called obesity epidemic. Poulain argues that food historians challenged the empirical validity of progressive accounts of food transition, arguing that monocultures reduced agrobiodiversity and the quality of nutrition on an individual level. Thus, looking at the population as a level of analysis does not say much about individuals. This is shown in the decolonization of culinary subjectivities, as described by Abarca as well as in the changing diets of Vietnamese women, addressed by Ehlert. A final contribution is to critically enquire into the relationships between theoretical models and empirical contexts, calling for more context-based theories of change. When empirical evidence fails to support a theory, the scope of its validity must be accordingly restricted. In this sense, it is particularly relevant to consider that most theorists of transition are based on data related to 'developed countries' and based on a diffusion of their model to the rest of the world.

In transition theories, assumptions of predicted, evolutionist social change still take precedence. Needless to say, such assumptions have also shaped the modernization paradigm in the social sciences, with simplistic dichotomies between tradition and modern societies, and a one-size-fits-all theoretical model that was actually a stylized abstraction from very situated cases. This is, perhaps, where sociological debates on social change can make a much-needed contribution, bringing to the fore other explanatory models, such as dialectical and cyclical change. They also highlight the role of contingency in what are, more often than not, unpredictable and unexpected results, as discussed above, as well as

macro-sociological debates on different roads to modernity (Domingues, 2013; Therborn, 2010), multiple modernities (Eisenstadt, 2000), entangled modernities (Boatcă & Costa, 2015; Randeria, 2002). In addition, sociological perspectives on change highlight issues such as social conflict and social cohesion in such processes, in which, beyond transformation on the level of structures, the analysis must take into account the role of active social agents. Another blind-spot of nutritional transition theories identified by Poulain is that they only rely on FAO statistics of food availability and on urban statistics, lacking data on rural and informal food production. Borghoff and Teixeira's article in this volume, and the data contained therein, shed light on food production for self-consumption and the diversity of diets due to small-scale or even household gardens, usually lead by women.

Conclusion

This monograph presents a broad spectrum of approaches that use food to analyse social change, exploring transformations at the level of structures and institutions, groups and social movements, and the role of agents, both from the elite and the grassroots. Because of the very nature of the research object, this collection is purposefully multidisciplinary, bringing together scholars from sociology, anthropology and multidisciplinary fields such as gender studies, STS and collective health.

Furthermore, this volume deliberately engages in an international reach, exploring food worldwide and in diverse socio-political contexts. Through the prism of food, the articles seek to understand complex social dynamics, by engaging with key concepts and discussions, such as nation building, transition or food movements, among others.

From different theoretical and methodological perspectives, the articles analyse social change at the micro, meso and macro levels, focusing on food cultures and practices, activism around food, or state-led policies regarding national cuisines, and how all of them either perform or instigate social change. Drawing on various theoretical schools such as post-structuralism, political ecology, theories of practice and posthumanism, the articles also rely on diverse methods and data such as interviews, focus groups, ethnography, visual data, statistics, and analysis of policy documents, digital archives and mass media. Thematically, they cover social change in nutritional transitions over large historical periods, showing food as mediating between ecology and society, nature and culture; in varied national responses to global dynamics in food production, exchange and consumption; in renewed processes of nation building and through food cultures; in disputes over food risks and the legitimacy of knowledge in food politics; in the transformation of food and nutrition into medicines, through a persistent trust in technology and technofixes; in social movements and social innovations that expand concepts of justice to include food justice; in the rising consciousness of social, cultural, historical and environmental impacts of everyday culinary practices, which might lead to emergent changes in values and cultures; in the transformation of food practices as self-care and lifestyle.

The effort to bring together different lines of research guided by the foundational sociological question of social change is a worthy and necessary enterprise, because this topic has been treated rather erratically by subfields or thematic clusters. This volume innovates, above all, in the geographical breadth of research assembled. Most

handbooks, collections and monographs in the food studies field are strongly orientated toward the Anglo-Saxon, or the European at best. A collective endeavour towards a global sociology of food is still a major challenge, and this monograph takes a few steps in this direction, by inviting contributions from, with, and about the Global South.

Over the distinct chapters, food is discussed pluralistically, taking account of different social-historical, economic and political contexts. In this sense, we are accepting Charles Tilly's challenge to 'bring together the evidence from "history from below" along with theories and systematic studies of socio-political change' (Castañeda, 2009, para. 1.12). Using food as a lens for trying to make sense of complex social dynamics, the collection offers a mix of country-specific case studies, from which concepts are developed that might inform other studies (culinary nationalism, culinary elites, culinary subjectivities, good food) and wider-sweeping overviews via key concepts (e.g. food transition, food movements). Topics such as gender, indigeneity, social inequalities, the nation, globalization, acquire new shapes when discussed from different theoretical standpoints, methodological approaches and a variety of experiences.

In the current world, going through a global pandemic, the dichotomy change/stability, as in a 'before and after' picture, should be re-thought as change while in movement, in order to keep sociological analysis relevant. As Cardoso said, 'the richest of challenges for the construction of a theory of change does not assume that the destination . . . can be known in advance' (Cardoso, 1987, p. 186). We asked a very classical sociological question and brought together interdisciplinary efforts to critically approach it, focusing on a basic issue: food. And we did so by presenting not only a geographical variety of cases, but authors in different stages of their careers and based in Europe, North America, the Middle East, South East Asia and Latin America. This volume, therefore, brings more challenges than definitive answers, as we understand the construction of a global sociology of food as an ongoing effort as well an integral part of social change.

Funding

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