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CHAPTER 14

FOOD AND EMPIRE

JAYEETA SHARMA

"[W]hen it is winter with us, the sun somewhere else in the British Empire is reddening apples and putting the juice into oranges."

—*Publicity write-up for an Empire Marketing Board poster*¹

Between 1926 and 1933, the Empire Marketing Board used an array of advertisements, films, exhibits, and posters to send food products of empire into British homes. The real message of its publicity campaigns was that fruit from Australia or tea from India was not foreign. By dint of being imperial, such foods were also British. In buying and demanding them, the British consumer was consuming the products of her own garden. It is open to question, however, as to how much success the Board met in these specific efforts to promote intra-imperial consumption, indeed, whether those efforts were needed in the first place. Trading and colonial ventures of the early modern period had been inextricably tied to the dissemination of foods that were hitherto unfamiliar or uncommon. With the establishment of European empires and industrial societies, complex circuits spanned the globe that involved the production, distribution, and consumption of both new and old foods. Long before the Empire Marketing Board's campaign, a typical grocery list for metropolitan consumers already included products from every corner of empire, affordable to some degree for almost every one of its classes. The bounty of empire was less evident when it came to the diets and lives of those who inhabited the empire's peripheries.

The first section of the essay examines foods from Asia and America that were originally perceived as exotic in Europe, initially served as markers of elite status, and their gradual dissemination downwards. It also discusses how and why groups of people living in socially subordinate settings and geographically distant lands,

adapted to strange foods imposed on them by the workings of the new European empires. The next section moves on to consider the role of long-distance trade and modern technologies in the creation and dissemination of new agro-industrial foods across networks of imperial knowledge and commodity circulation. The last section examines the circulation and adaptation of hitherto localized foods and their producers into imperial and postcolonial arenas, and goes on to explore the impact of the contemporary era's domination by global food corporations that serve in many ways as a new face of European and American empire.

DOMESTICATED EXOTICS AND COLONIAL PASSAGES

In the 1920s, the agricultural geneticist Edward East noted: "Today one sits down to breakfast, spreads out a napkin of Irish linen, opens the meal with a banana from Central America, follows with a cereal of Minnesota sweetened with the product of Cuban cane, and ends with a Montana lamb chop and cup of Brazilian coffee. Our daily life is a trip around the world, yet the wonder of it gives us not a single thrill."¹ Locating the beginnings of such a culinary trip around the world necessitates going back a few centuries, to the early modern era, when European mercantilism and early capitalism were gradually transforming cultural encounters and power relations around the world, the era when foods from distant lands did thrill the Europeans who had access to them.

Paul Freedman's study of spices in the European imagination notes their centrality to medieval cookery and medicine. But he emphasizes that their prestige and versatility went well beyond such uses. Spices from the exotic, mysterious East were prized as symbols of material comfort and social prominence. The popular myth that spices were essential as preservatives for meat misunderstands the nature of medieval foodways and overstates the utility argument. Spices were important flavorings for sophisticated elite cookery of the medieval era, in both Europe and Asia. But it was their scarcity and expense in medieval and early-modern Europe that made them, above all, markers of status expressed through conspicuous consumption.² In the case of one such spice, sugar, Sidney Mintz remarks that the elaborate marzipan subtleties at European royal banquets of the fourteen century were highly effective table-side displays of power and pelf, given sugar's rarity and cost in medieval times.³ But by the sixteenth century, sugar's increased availability permitted even modest gentry and mercantile households to offer scaled-down sugar creations on festive occasions. As with sugar, most spices gradually increased in accessibility and moved down the social scale, even as early modern Europeans expanded direct contacts with the lands where they originated.

Paula de Vos's study of how the Spanish state sponsored a wide-ranging program for spice transplantation and cultivation provides an early example of how

European political powers began to employ colonial and scientific agents to further their food desires. Certainly, this Spanish program to extend the cultivation of spices met with limited success except for the Asian ginger-root transplanted into the Caribbean. Nonetheless, these Spanish endeavors in economic botany were important precursors of later British, Dutch, and French imperial quests that increasingly used scientific efforts to further the domestication of exotic or scarce foods.⁴ In the case of spices, however, as expanding trading and plantation initiatives made them relatively affordable and plentiful, the European elite taste for heavily spiced dishes gradually receded. For instance, the intervention of sugar supplies from Caribbean plantations moved it from the category of rare spice to everyday condiment, from luxury to perceived necessity, from conspicuous consumption to invisible staple. Sugar's new abundance also enabled its new role as a companion to other foods, such as tea and coffee, which together created new tastes and habits for European consumers.

One of the important ways in which food history provides new insights into the processes of European exploration and colonization is by showing how newly available tropical foods quickly became markers of European conquests and elite status. One such food was the pineapple, whose very appearance as a delicious fruit with a forbidding exterior excited curiosity, admiration, and desire. Early Portuguese, Dutch, and English adventurers triumphantly carried back pineapples as conquering booty. Initially, it served as a royal prize, as in a 1668 banquet hosted by King Charles II of England for the French Ambassador where "the rare fruit called the King-pine" was displayed, possibly as an emblem of English dominion over contested Caribbean islands. Horticulturally minded aristocrats vied to build hot-houses to breed superior examples. By the eighteenth century, pineapples appeared on North American tables, as decorative motif and food. The fruit continued to circle the globe as an object of culinary, social, and economic value along new and expanding currents of European and American commerce and colonization.⁵

Brian Cowan notes that simple contacts with new foods from overseas did not automatically bring actual assimilation into Old World dietary habits. Acceptance hinged on a host of factors, an important one being the European interest in new foods and drinks nurtured by influential scientific virtuosi such as the British physician and plant collector Sir Hans Sloane who introduced cocoa from Jamaica. This and other tropical crops first introduced into Europe as medicinal ingredients, tobacco, coffee, and tea, quickly entered the Galenic universe. Subsequently, they moved out of the medical domain into that of everyday tastes, first for elites and then more broadly. Often this was in a different mode from their original use, as for instance when Sloane added sugar and milk to cocoa to make drinking chocolate.

The complex interplays of gender, race, and class further shaped the domestic assimilation of such exotics. The marriage of the Portuguese princess Catharine of Braganza to Charles II gave a fashionable fillip to tea-drinking among English elites, celebrated in verse by the poet and parliamentarian, Edmund Waller. In keeping with the princess's patronage, eighteenth-century English society largely saw tea as a beverage that belonged to the world of upper-class feminine domesticity. Coffee

by contrast, imported by the English East India Company from Mocha and by its Dutch counterpart from Java, was linked with masculine sociability. The Royal Society and Lloyd's Insurance Company were just two outposts of upper-class male associational culture in London that owed their origins to coffee-house sociability. For Europeans, coffee's imagined association with Turkey meant that coffee-houses often brandished the institutional sign of a Turk's Head.⁷

Once new exotics had entered into elite dietary routines, many filtered downwards in terms of price, availability, and social class. In a study of English overseas trade statistics where groceries included tea, coffee, rice, sugar, pepper, and other tropical products, in 1700, such former exotic commodities comprised 16.9 percent of all imports by official value; by 1800, their share rose to 34.9 percent.⁸ Not all exotics gained popularity or acceptability, or even the same degree of success. An exhibit that aroused much curiosity at London's Great Exhibition of 1851 was that of a beverage called Paraguay "tea."⁹ This was advertised as a cheap substitute for China tea, but the leaves could not be imported in sufficient quantity. Coffee, whose production was undertaken by all the European powers in their colonial hinterlands, retained its appeal for elite male society in Britain, but did not extend its appeal in the same manner as tea. The eventual success of tea for British consumers depended in large part on its successfully transcending class and gender lines.

Troy Bickham argues that the increasing domestication of tropical foods such as sugar, tea, tobacco, or coffee made them ubiquitous symbols of empire, as their advertisement, retail, preparation and consumption reflected and contributed to British perceptions of their nation's expanding reach across the world.¹⁰ But, as Linda Colley reminds us, well into the early nineteenth century, the British hold over colonial possessions remained insecure.¹¹ In that light, the relatively early assimilation of imperial commodities into quotidian metropolitan lives takes on added significance, as assertions of dominion over non-European territories and non-white peoples that were as yet only partially under British sway.

Colonial and imperial networks played an important role in the spread and adoption of new foods not only into the metropole, but in their trans-migration into other parts of empire. A key example here is the New World's potato tuber, famously introduced by Elizabethan buccaneer-colonists into England, and by returning Spanish colonists into Spain and other parts of Europe. Despite the potato's early journey into the Old World, it was not until the late-eighteenth century that it entered the common diet of Europeans. Most notably, this took place in the colonized economy of Ireland where the potato came into its own as a cheap and prolific peasant staple that substituted for the Irish wheat harvests siphoned off by the English revenue machinery. The tragic consequences of the resultant dietary monoculture are well-known, most notably the Great Hunger of the mid-nineteenth century where the potato harvest's collapse and the colonial state's indifference led to the death of an estimated million and the emigration of at least another million. In New Zealand, its indigenous Maori population first encountered the potato as a tropical crop that had been acclimatized in Europe into a form capable of weathering temperate climes. John Fitzpatrick describes how the potato spread rapidly

after 1801, through Maori kumara (sweet potato) growing techniques, and the close relationship between this new food and the new military dynamic whereby Maori forces challenged the British during the New Zealand Wars of 1843-1872.¹² At times, colonial authorities themselves played a key role in encouraging the production and consumption of such new foods. In India, the New World's potato arrived during the early modern era of Mughal rule, but did not come into vogue. Only after the British state launched agricultural improvement campaigns to popularize potato cultivation did it become an essential element of new pan-Indian diets, albeit as an addition to the vegetable repertoire supplement a grain-based diet, rather than as a staple or a carbohydrate as in Europe.¹³

Imperial laboring regimes and the lived encounters and power equations involved with them often played an important role in transforming and modifying food availability and dietary practices in a particular territory or among a particular people. The triangular trade in human beings and commodities across the Middle Passage transported salt cod from Canada and Newfoundland to the Caribbean even as it sent rum and sugar to Africa and Europe, and molasses to Newfoundland. In several cases, the actual adoption of a previously unknown food resulted from a lack of choice upon distant, inhospitable shores, or from penny-pinching by colonizing masters. For instance, Black Loyalists transplanted to Nova Scotia after the American Revolution and African slaves sent there after the War of 1812 encountered a lack of shelter and food that forced them to live off corn and molasses. The easy availability of cheap molasses, the byproduct of Caribbean sugar production, eventually made them an integral part of the diet of Newfoundland fisher communities. Similarly, French imperial networks imported huge quantities of Irish salt beef into Martinique and Guadeloupe. Its demand arose not from the slaves but from the French state that favored salt beef as the cheapest source of portable protein. On British plantations in the Caribbean, sugar laborers were provided the lowest-grade of Newfoundland salt cod as the only type of protein in their rations.¹⁴

Certainly, there were many occasions where colonized groups refused to cooperate with such dietary changes imposed from above. For instance, Caribbean plantation slaves managed to resist attempts by French and British colonists to introduce flour made from the transplanted Tahitian breadfruit tree, in place of imported wheat flour, perhaps the most ambitious Enlightenment era project of food substitution on record. Despite long lobbying for breadfruit introduction to replace the more expensive wheat, planters had made few arrangements to distribute it or instruct slave workers how to harvest, prepare, and cook the fruit. Also, slaves lacked protein sources, not starches since they already cultivated cassava, yam, and sweet potatoes in their own gardens. Interestingly, once slavery was abolished, breadfruit did make its way into the Caribbean diet, in new local dishes. After Slave Emancipation, straitened circumstances made dishes of breadfruit cou-cou, boiled breadfruit, steamed breadfruit, roasted breadfruit, and pickled breadfruit grudgingly acceptable, despite its unsavory link to planter coercion. As a Caribbean folklorist has it, such cheap and filling dishes "put food in the belly of

a lot 'o poor people" who would otherwise have gone without.¹⁵ As a poor person's staple, breadfruit retained its symbolic meaning as a "low" culture object.¹⁶

Thus, human ingenuity managed in diverse ways to transmute strange foodstuffs and culinary practices forced by imperial policies upon subaltern populations, into new dishes and cuisines. The conjunction of Newfoundland salt cod with an indigenous fruit used in slave kitchens created the now ubiquitous Caribbean dish, saltfish and ackee. Another group of post-Emancipation sugar workers, the indentured laborers imported from British-ruled India to Trinidad and Guyana, transmuted their homeland's flatbreads and accompaniments into a hybridized, portable dish that eventually became a ubiquitous street food in the Caribbean. This was the goat or pumpkin roti where the flatbread formed a burrito-like shell encasing the meat or vegetables and the spiced sauce in which they were cooked, a dish that could be easily taken to work.¹⁷ At the other end of that Atlantic exchange, Newfoundlanders began to valorize molasses, formerly the food of scarcity, as a proud badge of regional identity enshrined in popular lore and song.¹⁸ In such manner, many dishes, borne of necessity and hardship, gradually became creolized cultural markers or took on the role of society's iconic receptacles for nostalgia.

To conclude, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, many tropical and New World commodities made such the transition from expensive exotics to domesticated larder staples, even as European trading ventures were transformed into colonial empires and plantation producing cultures. Intrinsic to this transition was the altered social meaning of such commodities as the gradual rise of European political and economic power over distant lands brought the products of their landscapes and inhabitants into imperial circulatory circuits, aided by new technologies of production, distribution, and communication.

INDUSTRIAL FOODS: CIRCULATION, PLENITUDE, AND HUNGER

In November 1909, the Hon. A. A. Kirkpatrick declared, "I look forward to the time when, with the aid of your kinsmen beyond the sea, we shall be able to make this Empire of ours self-supporting, so that in times of stress we shall be able to live in spite of anybody."¹⁹ Kirkpatrick was then the Agent-General for South Australia and this was at a meeting of the Royal Colonial Institute in London, where the special subject for discussion was the resources and future prospects of Tasmania and Australia. His speech was preceded by glowing accounts of how trade in Antipodean fruit, fish, and wheat was raising the standard of living in Britain, the mother country. Following from this booster advocacy of imperial foods, this section of the essay explores the impact of long-distance trade and technological innovation in the diffusion of foods across empires and the creation of new agro-industrial foods that linked metropolises and colonies in ever more complicated networks of knowledge and commodity circulation.

At another meeting of the Royal Colonial Institute during the same year, a member presented a paper that described how the first Canadian apples had reached Britain in the 1860s, in a small speculative lot from an Ontario merchant. Fruit eventually became one of the mainstays of intra-imperial food trading networks. Prescient observations about this diversified food landscape at the heart of the empire came from the Indian traveler, N. L. Doss, who in 1893 published an account of his travels across England, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, and Ceylon. When Doss visited London's Covent Garden market in December, he exclaimed in surprise at the large quantities of fruit sold even at that inclement season. They included exotic varieties such as bananas and pineapples from the West Indies, oranges from Spain, Malta, and Joppa, as well as commoner pears and apples from Australia and Tasmania. By 1908, Canada exported 1,629,400 barrels of green and ripe apples, of which Great Britain received no less than 1,490,311 barrels.²⁰ Doss remarked that "subsequently when I visited those countries I found that this exportation of fruit to England forms a chief source of the income of the colonists."²¹ He went on to observe that such a display of out-of-season fresh produce was unthinkable in his home city of Calcutta where only local fruits were available. Clearly, the imperial capital was, as yet, the most important destination for fresh foods from across empire. For those of its consumers who could buy them, these imperial food products transcended the limits of nature, time, and space.

The numerous pineapples that Doss admired at Covent Garden could only be an upper-class treat since they cost about six shillings each, in contrast to the humbler banana, sold at a penny. However, modern agro-industrial technology was about to change the aristocratic character of this tropical fruit, and many others. In 1901, the New England businessman James D. Dole arrived on Hawaii shortly after the kingdom was annexed by the United States. There, he conjured up a vision of pineapple cornucopia to add to its sugar fields: of "plantations and canneries and native workers and ships carrying cargoes of fruit to all the world."²² By 1915, a host of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Korean, and Portuguese men, women, and children worked in his fields and canning factories. In pursuance of his vision, Dole and other members of the Hawaiian Pineapple Growers' Association launched a spirited campaign from 1908–1912, at their headquarters in New York City, to send canned pineapple into the pantries and tables of middle-class homemakers. Pineapple was portrayed as the sanitary, convenient, and delicious embodiment of an island paradise in magazines such as the *Ladies Home Journal*. In 1939, the modernist artist Georgia O'Keefe was enlisted to visit Hawaii and promote cans of Dole pineapple juice through her painting, *Pineapple Bud*. Sitting in their homes, European and American middle classes were being invited to savor the taste of the tropics, in the manner of past elites and pioneering empire-builders.

The foundation of Dole's American agro-industrial empire came from its utilization of innovations in food and transport technology that European powers had already initiated. In the development of industrial cuisine, the most important factors were developments in preserving (salting, pickling, biscuits, canning, freezing), mechanization (for production in both agriculture and in the factory, also

for preparation, and distribution), retailing and wholesaling (commercial catering, branding, packaging, selling, advertising), and transport (railways, cargo ships). Imperial ambitions often drove the development of such innovations. For instance, the modern canning industry dates back to 1809 when a Parisian confectioner won the French government's prize for anyone who could preserve meats for its army and navy serving in distant and inhospitable lands. A British firm subsequently replaced the French use of glass bottles with cans made of iron sheets dipped in molten tin.²³ Subsequently, whether for European troops deployed up Egypt's Nile River, explorers seeking the Pole, or emissaries of the British Raj in India, canned foods ranging from green peas to steak and kidney pudding and potted beef became essential accoutrements of imperial ventures. In British India, canned foods and wine and spirits for European colonial consumers soon formed a significant part of the huge import bill that Indian nationalists resented as a "drain of wealth."

Two of the behemoths of modern food production, the canning industry and the production of biscuits were first directed to the needs of European travelers, explorers, armed forces, traders, and colonial officers overseas. Only after that first stage did the industrial production of canned and processed foods begin to impinge upon the internal markets in Europe and local markets overseas. On seeing the awe-inspiring scale of the Huntly and Palmer's biscuit concern at Reading, the traveler Doss remarked that his countrymen and women in India were already familiar with the name of that English firm and its celebrated products. According to him, "there is scarcely a single-English speaking youth in Bengal who has not had a taste of these delicacies, however heterodox they may be as articles of food in the opinion of an orthodox Hindu."²⁴ The availability of condensed milk cans and ginger biscuits in colonial shops catering to Europeans made them visible to aspirational locals. For most inhabitants of British India, high costs and the presence of ritual barriers against unfamiliar foods rendered such industrial foods of empire practically unreachable. But the young were creative in their quests for such alluring novelties. In the small provincial town of Sibsagar, during the 1920s, European-style bread and biscuits were still forbidden foods for high-caste Hindu families but their school-going sons occasionally persuaded less ritual-bound Muslim classmates to provide them with illicit tastes. As the twentieth century wore on, their strangeness decreased as did ritual prohibitions. For instance, biscuits, initially new and expensive, became more affordable when locally manufactured. British India's first biscuit factory was the Britannia biscuit company, established in Calcutta in 1892, which expanded greatly with lucrative British government contracts during the world wars. Eventually, India became the world's second largest producer of biscuits, with products as varied as chocolate Bournons to cummin biscuits, and the word finding quotidian use in every Indian language.²⁵

The biggest impact of industrial-age technology on European and American food supplies came through its role in providing a reliable supply of fresh meat to consumers. Australian canned meat still fed British troops during the Boer War, as well as colonists in New Zealand, New Guinea, Fiji, China, India, Java,

and Mauritius. Canned meat maintained empire's emissaries abroad but domestic consumers who yearned for fresh meat were deterred both by high prices and lack of availability. For Doss, meat, "the chief article of the Englishman's food," was a matter of deep interest. His wanderings around London convinced him of the extent to which England had become dependent on other countries for its meat. Until the late-nineteenth century, salted and cured pork products formed the bulk of American meat exports to Britain, since beef did not take well to curing. There also developed an Atlantic trade in live cattle, despite many difficulties. Meanwhile, experiments in meat refrigeration were underway in South America, the United States, France, and Australia. In 1874, the first cargo of beef was successfully shipped from the United States to England; in 1877, from Australia to England. By the end of the nineteenth century improvements in refrigeration facilities began to revolutionize the meat trade. Such improvements eventually realized the desire to have fresh meat available year-around at European markets.

In the United States, by the mid-nineteenth century, the tremendous expansion of the livestock industry brought huge changes in ecology and food patterns. The incursion of settlers' cattle into Western and Pacific coast grasslands accelerated the demise of the native bison that had already been precipitated by hunters supplying hides and other bison parts to new industrial enterprises. Andrew Isenberg shows that the hugely increased numbers of cattle in Wyoming and Montana, by the 1880s, corresponded to a fall in the bison population in the region to a few hundreds. Russel Barsh claims that the demise of the bison principally benefited Western cattlemen of the industrial age, just as it destroyed the ecology and living cultures of Native American groups. Having connived at the destruction of the bison, the United States government became a major buyer of beef to feed the inhabitants of its new Native American reservations. Even from a nutritional viewpoint, this was a negative development since bison was much lower than beef in total fats and saturated fats. Coupled with the flour and sugar that made up the bulk of Native rations, this dietary regime was a slow disaster for such dislocated groups, the victims of internal colonialism and industrial expansion. Meanwhile, the demand for beef grew even greater as the westward expansion of railroads allowed emigrant trains, the army, and mining settlements to acquire supplies from a distance. The United States gradually became preoccupied with supplying this huge domestic demand.²⁶

Australia, New Zealand, and Argentina eventually became Britain's main suppliers of meat. One of the early success stories in such long-distance oceanic trade was the Dunedin's ninety-eight-day voyage in 1882 sailing from New Zealand to London with 5,000 frozen mutton carcasses. Beef formed an important part of the new refrigerated trade, given its scarcity in England where there was an estimated single head of cattle for every seven people. Argentina soon acquired dominance in this market since well-to-do British consumers preferred its high-quality chilled beef and mutton. Hard-frozen Antipodean meats sold at cheaper prices to low-end British consumers. By 1911, the Argentine chilled beef industry was controlled by

British, Argentine, and American interests. During the First World War, deeming the Argentine meat supply to be of vital national importance for Britain, the British government even leased one of the main meat plants at Las Palmas, which it continued to operate for many years. In this manner, imperial circuits of meat supply became crucial to British consumers of the industrial age, as well as to the imperial economies that supplied them.²⁷

Despite the abundance of such imperial foods in London markets, the reality was that price and income constraints still limited their everyday consumption to British society's higher ranks. Several tropical commodities—cocoa, sugar, tea, coffee—that became ubiquitous in Britain, were ones which provided affordable and quick calories for Britain's new industrial proletariat. The imperial history of these foods, which Mintz terms as "drug foods," requires inserting the experiences of labor mobilization and changes in imperial consumption—right into the British industrial and mass consumption revolutions. Tea, for instance, became indispensable for British consumers across class and gender lines with the wide availability of cheap empire-grown supplies from new Assam, Darjeeling, and Ceylon plantations, alongside the older, prestigious Chinese varieties. In contrast to slave-grown sugar whose consumption British Abolitionist opinion opposed, Indian tea, cultivated by ostensibly free laborers, lacked a clear binary that made visible the structures of oppressive colonial production. It needs to be remembered that tea was, for a long time, Indian only in its labor force and production sites; the British dominated its manufacture, distribution, and sale. The leaves were dispatched from British-owned plantations to be repackaged by grocery firms such as Lipton into boxes of English and Irish Breakfast Tea. Boosters of the East India Company's Indian tea exports argued that colonial control over tea production and distribution not only augmented British revenues but aided spread of civil virtues, whether among metropolitan working-classes or among India's "natives." In British India, the diffusion of tea-drinking was part of a distinct modern sensibility, heavily inflected by classed and gendered mores, and the expansion of public arenas. In rural Assam of the early twentieth century, local villagers tended to reserve market-purchased tea for important (usually male) visitors, while family members used milk from their cows for everyday consumption. In rural Bihar, many villagers classed tea with tobacco consumption, both practices predominantly associated with male public venues and cash outlays. In such societies where alcohol use invited social censure, tea gradually began to serve the purpose of a pint elsewhere, as a lubricant of public sociability.

To sum up, the story of industrial food needs to be told in a larger transnational framework that takes into account the actions of empires and the European and American domination accompanying its rise. Inserting into a single frame such landmarks of food history as the demise of the American bison, emergence of California and Hawaii fruit farming, man-made Irish and Indian famines, indentured labor on Assam tea and Caribbean sugar plantations, and the rise of Australian and Argentine cattle industry, allows a new reading of histories of industrialization, imperialism, and food in a truly global manner.

LOCAL AND GLOBAL FOODS: EMPIRES AND THEIR AFTERMATH

This final section of the essay discusses how imperial connections facilitated the process by which certain foods, Indian-style curry dishes for instance, gradually begun their journey towards global acceptance, albeit often in significantly changed forms. It explores how the diffusion and adaptation of previously localized and home-style foods into the global marketplace is tied to the movement of laboring bodies, often forced into mobility by the strains and stresses of successive deindustrialization, decolonization, the political conflicts and economic dislocations attending the birth and development of new nations from colonies. It further analyses how the globally linked production and circulation of foods in the post-colonial era have had a differential impact upon people and societies of the Global North and South, all in various ways the legacies of empire.

In 1897, G. P. Pillai, a resident of the Indian city of Madras, published his account of the West, titled *London and Paris Through Indian Spectacles*. Pillai reflected that it was a great advantage that one had no choice but to travel to England by sea since the voyage allowed colonized subjects to better adapt to metropolitan mores. "On board the steamer you begin to eat English dinners, you dress like Englishmen, you learn English manners, and become accustomed to English ways."²⁸ While his compatriot Doss was impressed by London's abundance of imperial produce, Pillai was awestruck by the city's restaurants and their splendidly versatile bills of fare. However, he was one with Doss in astonishment that London, the seat of British imperial power and pelf where all educated Indians aspired to travel and stay, could not produce a decent dish of "curry."

It seems paradoxically parochial that such cosmopolitan Indians as Doss and Pillai would seek out "curry and rice" when they visited Britain. The explanation seems to lie in the prominence that "curry" enjoyed in Victorian Britain. As early as 1747, Hannah Glasse produced the first known English recipe to make "a curry in the Indian way," in her book that claimed to instruct "the lower sort" in good household cookery.²⁹ By 1861, Isabella Beeton included no less than fourteen recipes for curry in her manual of household management, chiefly as a means to cook leftover meats by spicing them up with curry powder.³⁰ Troy Bickham argues that the explosion of cookbooks with such empire-related dishes allowed British consumers the opportunity to replicate and celebrate imperial experiences in their homes and clubs, just as consuming tea, coffee, cocoa, or sugar operated as an act of imperial participation through the performance of an everyday ritual.³¹ However, the metropole's simulacrum of the empire's foodways appeared somewhat differently to those from its peripheries. Colonial visitors such as Doss and Pillai initially regarded the British popularity of curry as an appreciation of Indian tastes. In London, they eagerly sought curry as a familiar taste of home, but also as a taste of India in Britain. To their chagrin, they found that what they understood by the term curry was an altogether different food from the British versions then

in circulation. The culinary historian Alan Davidson observed that until the eighteenth century, the English use of spices in cooking techniques made the East India Company representatives in India much more appreciative of Mughal-influenced ceremonial dishes than were their Raj successors. In keeping with such appreciation, Hannah Glasse's curry recipe of that era used aromatic whole spices such as coriander seeds. However, by the nineteenth-century visits of Doss and Pillai, this subtle spicing became bastardized into generic curry powder mixes, sold commercially, and loose inspiration from British-Indian cookbooks (e.g., Colonel Kenney-Herbert's recipe of 1885).³² This food change mirrored the increased tendency of the British of the high imperial Raj to acquire distance from what they critically viewed as the dirt, disease, and backwardness of a tropical colony. Curry increasingly became a British meat dish with a small amount of rice cooked and served with it, rather than the South Asian dish of sauced meats cooked with spices and eaten as one of a number of sides with rice.³³ The curry that Doss and Pillai ate (and disliked) in London was a British appropriation of yet another tropical taste. Pillai wryly observed, "rice holds a subordinate place to curry here, while in India it is just the reverse. If curry is badly prepared, rice is worse cooked."³⁴

Beyond the gaze of Doss and Pillai, curry in Britain was to change even more over the twentieth century, bound up with the changing destinies of the empire and its denizens. In the London that they visited, places where even remotely palatable Indian-style cooking might be available, such as the lascars' shipboard kitchen or the dockside areas of London and Bristol, were sufficiently on the margins that class conventions kept out middle-class visitors. Notwithstanding a few coffee-houses that purported to serve curry, it was only in the early-twentieth century that Asian immigrants opened the first "curry-house" restaurants, aimed at a British working-class and Indian sojourner clientele. They were followed in 1926 by an upper-class venture on Regent Street, Veeraswamy's restaurant. Its founder, Edward Palmer, who claimed to be the great-grandson of an English general and an Indian princess, had successfully run a Mughal Palace food stall at the Wembley Empire Exhibition.³⁵ His restaurant came to be known as "the ex-Indian higher serviceman's curry club." In 1935, Veeraswamy's was sold to a flamboyant businessman and Conservative M.P., Sir William Arthur Steward. A 1940s Veeraswamy menu offered five kinds of curry, but also the standard restaurant dishes of the time. Nostalgic Old India hands could relish mulligatawny soup with Madras chicken curry and rice as less intrepid companions dined on macaroni au gratin and supreme of turbot.³⁶

Whether in Veeraswamy's kitchen and in the humble curry-houses of East London and Birmingham dockside areas, most makers of an emergent British Asian cuisine were former lascar seamen from the sea-faring region of Sylhet (then in East Bengal, now Bangladesh). Almost all lacked professional cooking skills, and in the gendered society of their homeland, few would ever have prepared food in the past, let alone the generic "curries" British consumers increasingly knew as Indian food.³⁷ Through the largely invisible, often illegal journeys of such migrants into the heart and hinterlands of the British Empire, hampered both by state regulations on free movement and the scarcity of essential ingredients, South Asian

food in Britain began its historic journey through a hybridized landscape of circulating commodities, people, and foods. Political landmarks of decolonization such as the 1947 Partition of India into warring nation-states and the 1971 Bangladesh War engendered human trauma and further displacement into Britain's shores. Such events bequeathed Britain more cheap labor from its erstwhile colonies to make the dish its inhabitants knew as curry, in restaurants named after symbols of past Indo-Persian imperial glory, such as the Kohinoor and Taj Mahal.³⁸

A broad consideration of the significant human and ecological costs of the expansion of industrial and imperial-era food production reveals that the repercussions were particularly widespread and severe upon colonized regions, going far beyond the health of individual populations. In Senegal, from the 1870s onwards, the imperatives of French metropolitan policies dictated that more than half the colony's land be diverted to the growing of a cash crop for export, ground-nuts. Instead of local food grains, Senegal's population was fed on imported rice surplus to requirements in French Indo-China. Local culinary mores soon changed to favor rice in lieu of indigenous grains such as millet and sorghum, which took more time to cook. The food legacy of empire was an enormous rice import bill that Senegal could ill afford. In British India, a range of imperial policies caused a drastic shift in commercial and livelihood patterns, and a steep rise in hunger. For instance, the rise in world demand for primary commodities and the British desire to meet them meant that the state encouraged the rapid spread of food-crops cultivated for export, whether tea or oilseeds or grains. All this expansion took place at the expense of subsistence crops that peasants previously grew for food. At the same time, India lost ground in traditional export areas such as textiles, hampered by imperial protectionist strategies such as high tariffs on Indian artisanal cotton goods entering Britain. Colonized India became an importer of British manufactured goods.³⁹ Indian economic historians described this as the deindustrialization of colonial India, the hidden face of the industrialization of imperial Britain. Rejecting neo-classical economic theories that portrayed this process as an inevitable working out of market forces, they saw this deindustrialization as wrought deliberately by colonial policies which destroyed through tariffs and high taxation India's traditional export-oriented craft production and created an agricultural sector with too many people to support for its ecological base. Other imperial policies which imposed laws restricting hunting and access to guns and ammunition for indigenous people not only resulted in the European monopoly of biological resources such as game but also increased food scarcities among local groups, limiting their access to readily available protein sources. Overall, whether in Asia, Africa, or Latin America, the age of empire saw the structural reshaping of colonial economies whose dangerous dependence on fluctuating world commodity prices created long-term conditions of stark income differentials and food hunger, both chronic and episodic.

From the late-nineteenth century onwards, the adoption of a free trade economy by Britain and the rapid industrialization of continental Europe, the United States, and Japan created a new level of demand for primary commodities and foodstuffs and transformed the world economy even as city dwellers and

industrial populations in these countries began to receive cheap foods in relative abundance. It gradually became clear that such cheap foods were not necessarily healthy foods. In the nineteenth century, food concerns centered around the adulteration of everyday foodstuffs, sought to be addressed by legislation such as the Food Adulteration Bills, enacted in Britain between 1860 and 1899. Later, the focus shifted to the health ravages caused by new industrial-era diets. In a sensational expose, *The Nation's Larder* lecture series at London's Royal Institution showed that rats fed the usual working-class diet of white bread, margarine, tinned meat, vegetables boiled with soda, cheap tinned jam, tea, sugar, and a little milk eventually developed disease, discontent, and even cannibalism.⁴⁰ Despite the publicity given to such findings, the subsequent development of a globalizing food regime in the hands of major corporations did little to stem the spread of similarly unhealthy industrial eating habits.

By the mid-twentieth century, the workings of global multinational corporations and the supermarkets they established to control food from field to table made global food commerce a reality over large parts of the world. The same supermarket outlets could be found in Thailand as in Britain, as could fast-food chains. While the majority of consumers in the Global South still depended on small retailers and vendors, the aspirational images of the marketplace suffused the worldwide realms of food and popular culture. For the majority of food buyers in the Global North, the supermarket's cornucopia seemed to have finally realized the food dreams of plentiful uniformity first visualized during the age of empire. By the late-twentieth century, this new European and American world of cheap and convenient food received a series of shocks from food scares that ranged from salmonella to mad cow disease. These scares involved not just concerns about food quality and consumer health, but about the potential of industrial foods to cause human deaths and disabilities, and the seeming inability of either scientists or states to eradicate such risks. Consumer responses to such food scares varied. For those who lost trust in the supermarket and chain networks of globalized food, smaller purveyors of organic and free-trade certified goods, local foods, and farmers' produce, offered some semblance of an alternative, if not a truly viable one. For others, the response was to call for greater vigilance on the part of supermarkets and the state to purify the food supply. But such vigilance, even as it reassures the Global North, has had troubling consequences for people in the Global South. Susanne Freidberg in her study of transnational food commodity networks across Europe and Africa points out that the late-twentieth century anxieties about food safety and the bureaucratized regulations that neoliberal governing and food procuring institutions have generated, have served to exclude and discriminate against smaller primary producers, especially ones based in the Global South.⁴¹

The other face of a global food culture operates via the continued movements of people from former imperial peripheries who seek a better livelihood, and flee the political chaos that neo-globalization has often caused in those regions as they decolonize. While the cities of the Global South host huge numbers of internal migrants, the phenomenon of global migrants as purveyors of global foods is most visible in

the Global North. That overseas laboring migrants gradually diversified public food cultures in the European and American world is as apparent to the layperson as to the academic. To offer just a few recent examples, the ambiguities and inequities inherent in their postcolonial homelands impelled Caribbean, Vietnamese, South Asian, and sub-Saharan migrants, to purvey home-cooking skills into precarious livelihoods in the new global cities where they sought refuge. It is almost a truism that every new wave of refugees into the Global North creates a new variety of "ethnic" eatery in New York, Toronto, or London, where formerly local foods such as the samosa or the empanada become transmuted into global foods.

NOTES

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