The Polyphony of Food

The Polyphony of Food:
Food through the Prism of Maslow's Pyramid

By

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PREFACE

Food is part and parcel of the most important ritual observances in religion and in everyday life, and a source of numerous language metaphors. Eating has often been described as the most political act we do on a daily basis, with our choices affecting our health, landscape, climate and economy.

Apart from being highly ritualized, food serves to highlight what we find beautiful or ugly, what we view as acceptable and unacceptable, proper or improper. As one of the most important expressions of material culture it marks dominant social distinctions in society – such as gender, class, religion, age, profession or ethnicity. Quite frequently, even the smallest deviations from an established routine may result in branding a person or an entire group as alien or strange. This is why the late 20th and early 21st century saw the publication of a spate of works dedicated to the edible history, geography, anthropology, sociology and psychology of human kind. There has been an explosive growth of food and culture studies in the past two decades and the emerging volumes came to focus on every aspect of food-related topics – its historical evolution, the structure of the meals, their symbolism and recently, even gender studies.[1]

This book is an attempt to view food holistically, using A. Maslow's needs analysis as an analytical instrument, and to show how food may satisfy an entire range not only of D (deficit) needs but also of B (being) needs. In addition to meeting the physiological need of sustenance (existence need) food and meals are a means to feel safe and secure and to affirm cultural and social identity. Also, they serve as a vehicle of bonding, affiliation, acceptance and esteem, as well as a means of self-actualization (relational and growth needs). The description addresses the intricacies of the changing foodscape and highlights identity discourse through the vehicle of food within Maslow's theoretical framework.

Key terms: Maslow's pyramid of needs, foodways, food and culture, food taboos, meal patterns, food discourse, food symbolism, food as bonding, food as safety, commensality, food as a signifier of identity, appropriate and inappropriate foods, food and politeness, food and adjustment, symbolic capital.

Notes

[1] See, for example, the two editions of the seminal *Food and Culture Reader* (1997; 2008) edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, which include chapters on Gender and Consumption, Food and Identity Politics, Political Economy of Food and, in general, define and legitimize the field of food and culture studies.

You Are What You Eat
—Anthelme Brillat Savarin

Food Means the World to Us
—Loblaws' billboard in Toronto in 1998

INTRODUCTION

Our childhood meals, or our mother's signature foods, are the territory of the heart rather than of the stomach. At the same time, though anthropophagus habits are abhorred and regarded as revolting and disgusting, they are still part of human psyche. Human beings and what they regard as food are integral parts of the same world, connected in a myriad of ways. This is especially clear to children. This is why the child protagonist of a story written by a great Canadian writer Margaret Attwood, which is entitled *Significant Moments in the Life of my Mother* (1984: 17), identified with the potato, rather than the little girl, her hunger and her loss – something the mother would have been very surprised to discover.

Food has become quite a buzz word in the 21st century and the volumes exploring this subject from different perspectives proliferate. The comparison of life to a meal is not a stock phrase. The main objective of this book is to explore food as a **multiple discourse** in the context of Abraham Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of human needs and motivations.

The hypothesis of a hierarchy of human needs was first put forward in 1943 as a tiered system of the organisation of common needs, more specifically as a pyramid representing a hierarchy of common needs – D (deficiency, existence) bottom level needs (physiological and safety) and higher level needs (acceptance, love, belonging, esteem), as well as the top B (being) need of self-actualization which A. Maslow regarded as growth and development needs rather than deprivation and deficit. This hierarchy of the five motivational needs is arranged by ascending order of importance:

5**. Self Actualization Needs**
Being needs; full potential needs; growth needs
(seeking peak experiences, self-fulfillment, personal growth; fun, humour, creativeness, independence, appreciation plus aesthetic needs, which were mentioned by Maslow but not included into the group, and cognitive needs – knowledge, meaning)

4. **Esteem Needs** (self respect, personal worth, autonomy, achievement, reputation, prestige, independence, status, dominance, prestige, managerial responsibility, etc.)

3**. Love and Belongingness Needs**
(love, friendship, acceptance, belonging, affiliation)

2. **Safety Needs**
Deficit needs, existence needs
(security, protection from the elements, stability, law, order)

1**. Physiological Needs**
(air, food, sleep, shelter, sleep, sex).

While those 5 human needs represent the most classic form of Maslow's pyramid the more recently adapted and revised diagrams also incorporate the following as growth and being needs at the top of the pyramid:

Aesthetic needs - appreciation and search for beauty, balance, form, etc

and

Cognitive needs - knowledge, meaning, etc. (1970 edited diagram).

It should be noted that Maslow repeatedly mentioned these motivations (1996) even though he did not set them apart as a separate tier.

The higher level being (B) needs become salient and turn into motivators only when the lower level deficiency (D) needs (such as food) have been met. (Maslow 1970/1943/1954) However, it may be proved that food and meals satisfy *both* higher- and lower level needs, i.e. that food cuts across the whole range of motivations.

While Maslow's theory has often been criticized because of its rigidity, undoubtedly it is a workable and useful tool for identifying the basic human necessities and motivations, and a fascinating perspective for their assessment. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is often portrayed in the shape of a pyramid, with the largest and most fundamental levels of needs at the bottom, and higher level needs at the top. Food is a classic lower level (physiological) need, which should be met before people start thinking about satisfying higher-level needs (belongingness, esteem and self-actualization). In Maslow's theory food as a basic psychological need pertains to the so-called D needs. But it would seem that food and eating cut across the whole hierarchical board of human motivations and morph

into a metaphor of life. Furthermore, it may be assumed that in many cases food takes on compensatory functions and stands for other needs. Therefore, as I will attempt to show, it may satisfy the entire range of D, and even of B needs.

In addition to meeting the physiological need of sustenance by virtue of consuming different food staples depending on geography, history, religion, etc., food and meals, and more specifically familiar foods, are a means to feel safe and secure, to affirm cultural and social identity, and to serve as a vehicle of bonding, affiliation, belonging, acceptance and love, as well as a means of self-actualization with its different values, including fun and humour. In this way, food discourse mirrors real or perceived identity of an entire nation, a group or an individual.

Undoubtedly, different terminology may be used to highlight the same, or very similar, issues. Northrop Frye, for instance, in his essay *Framework and Assumption* uses the terms 'primary concerns' and 'secondary concerns' (1991). According to Frye, our concerns for living in social units that build societies into nations or into class structures are derivative or secondary concerns, while the primary concerns underlying them are those for food, for shelter, for sexual relations, for survival. (Frye 1991: 89) While one cannot live even one day without being concerned about food, one may live all one's life without being experiencing the ultimate concern – that about God (Ibid). Frye argues, however, that throughout history creative and conscious concerns are inextricably bound to primary ones, a view which is similar to Maslow's stance on the relevance of the deficit needs.

Another definition of human motivations viewed from a psychological perspective is that of Gudykunst (1994) who breaks them down into the following groups:

> For a sense of security as a human being
> For a sense of predictability
> For a sense of group inclusion
> To avoid diffuse anxiety
> For a sense of a common shared world
> For symbolic/material gratification
> To sustain our self-conceptions (Gydukunst 1994: 159ff)

Maslow's theory has been criticised and praised, expanded, split apart and revisited. It is not my objective, however, to dwell on different versions of a revised motivational hierarchy (see, for example, Kenrick et al 2010) but rather to attempt an integrated view of food using a slighty adapted classic version of the hierarchy.

My aim is to prove that as well as sustenance food also has a relational character and may be a vehicle of cultural and psychological manipulation. Hence it may be regarded in terms of stability, acceptance, esteem and even self-actualization, i.e. it is very relevant in the context of different types of motivations, both as the deficiency and the being or growth needs.

I often use the term *discourse* because I consider that like language use, food patterns and foodways are not just a matter of individual choice, but are socially determined. The choice of food often depends not just on individual tastes but is a function of the social identities of people in interaction and their socially defined purposes.

The methods used in the study are common ethnographic and historical methods, such as participant observations, open-ended interviews in restaurants and cafés, conversations with street vendors, in homes and at family gatherings. I have also analysed publications in popular media, and culinary books, menus, advertising copies, blogs, and nutritional science publications. The surveys and polls in Canada were made possible owing to a Faculty Research Grant (FRP) from the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS) which I won in 2007. The research in the UK was partly sponsored by a bursary from the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE).

A lot of fictional examples are used in the book because I follow A. Appadurai in considering blurred borders and edges indicative for our age. This explains why " ….literature is currently used in anthropological volumes, whereas literature studies often debate the subjects which used to be regarded as quite alien for this area, in fact as alien as quantum physics, yet now they have turned into the centerpiece of debates." (Appadurai 1996: 80-85).

PART I

EXISTENCE NEEDS

Edible: adj.: Good to eat, and wholesome to digest, as a worm to a toad, a toad to a snake, a snake to a pig, a pig to a man, and a man to a worm.
—Ambrose Bierce

Principles have no real force except when one is well fed.
—Mark Twain

CHAPTER ONE

FOOD OR NOT (FOOD AS SUSTENANCE)

Anthropologists and ethnographers agree that food is often the subject of taboo or disgust because it is internalized and the very idea that something repulsive by our standards may become part of us makes us cringe (Poole 1993). As I can testify personally, in some parts of West Africa it is still quite common to see rats and " bush meat" (a euphemism for monkeys) on sale by the roadside, but in our neck of the woods rats are considered filthy creatures that consume human garbage, carry disease, and live in the sewers with human waste. This is why eating one for most westerners would be unthinkable. However, in Togo rats live a more wholesome existence in the forests and not in an environment filled with filth – so the idea of selling them at village markets and consuming them is not abhorrent to West Africans. Not surprisingly, therefore, the ideas of what is food are different for different cultures. The humble hamburger, a mainstay of U.S. cuisine, is a forbidden food for Hindus. Pork is off the menu for many Jews and Muslims. Shellfish is taboo for Orthodox Jews. All of these foods are delicacies on menus around the world and their consumption or shortage may cause trouble. See, for example, this excerpt from A. Burgess's *Malay Trilogy* on the divisions between different ethnicities living in Malaysia:

> Besides there was the question of food: the Chinese cried out for pork which, to the Muslims was haram and disgusting; the Hindus would not eat meat at all, despite the persuasion of the British matron; other Indians demanded burning curries and could not stomach the insipid lauk of the Malays. (Burgess 1981:39)

More than 1,400 species of protein-packed insects are part of African, Asian, Australian, and Latin American cuisine, but one would be hard pressed to find these creepy crawlies at a U.S. or European restaurant. As demonstrated by TV viewers' responses to reality shows such as Fear Factor eating insects can only be regarded as a nightmare for most. Snakes and rodents are not viewed as food in many countries either. The differences in traditions are especially apparent in breakfast foods. A

traditional breakfast in some Nigerian villages consists of dinner leftovers and palm wine. In rural China, common breakfast food will be rice or rice gruel from warmed up rice. Turkish peasants in some parts of Anatolia have lentil soup for breakfast whereas for the Masai shepherds of East Africa breakfast of blood, freshly let from live cows and mixed with milk, is equally palatable. Though the so-called full English breakfast is pride and joy for many Brits, it will be equally exotic for many people coming from other regions, and even for the English it is not at all that traditional any longer. Cheese and bread are regarded as very suitable for breakfast in many Balkan countries but not in the UK. Moreover, the history of many staples indicates that the use of the word "traditional" in relation to food is nothing but an overstatement. It is saliently evidenced by the breakfast cereal which has substantially changed eating patterns in many parts of the world indicates that the use of the word 'traditional' with regard to this food is very provisional.

Initially, cereals were developed in the United States to meet the needs of vegetarian groups like the Seventh Day Adventists, who were experimenting with cereal-based foods at Battle Creek, Michigan, in the 1850s where. Dr John Kellogg, director of 'the medical boarding house', carried out research into the so-called 'natural' foods.[1] In fact, at first cereals were described as "altogether different breakfast food." Even as late as early and mid 20-ith century the so-called traditional breakfasts in Canadian cookery book and home magazines, such as Canadian Home Journal (CHJ) and Chatelaine, included, apart from cold cereals, hot cereals, toasts, bran muffins, herb omelette, boiled eggs, slices of cold fowl or meat fried and served with stale bread dipped in egg. A typical 1920-ies breakfast in Canada also meant pancakes, poached eggs, whole wheat biscuits, fried cod, smoked haddie cooked in milk, baked herrings, cornbread, bacon, also juices and stewed and fresh fruits. The CHJ April 1931 breakfast suggestions for an average family included prepared cereals and cornmeal porridge, as well as sausages with cornmeal slice, sautéed salmon cakes, broiled ham, hot apple cornbread. Under "breakfast" the December 1963 Chatelaine *Meals of the Month* feature herb omelette, sautéed chicken livers, and broiled kidneys which would undoubtedly be highly unusual as breakfast food in present-day Canada. Significantly, in the first half of the 20th century cereals were often advertised not only as breakfast food but as part of any meals. See for example, CHJ August 1930:

> Any time you are hungry enjoy Kellogg's corn flakes and milk or cream. For **breakfast**, for **lunch**, for **supper** – for a little snack. They are great between meals and at any meal. (Emphasis added)

Even the 'old-fashioned conservative foods'–cheese and macaroni, meat and potatoes -regarded as staples by many people in the West can be traced back to relatively recent time. In general, taste changes have been repeatedly noted by experts and general public alike. According to M. Mead, for example, "scarcely one of the favourite dishes served at feasts would now be found eatable." (Quoted by Goody 1982:152)

In one of my surveys in Canada when I polled "new" Canadians, i.e. first generation immigrants, and "old" Canadians born and bred in Canada, all old Canadians in their 40-ies and 50-ies and older noted that their childhood foods had been more fatty. They had had fewer salads as children, and the vegetables had been mostly cooked (especially for the Jews of European descent, because raw vegetables were perceived by their parents as food for peasants), pork was more of a staple for both Anglo and French Canadians alike; cheese and macaroni were very prominent on the menu. Yet cheese and macaroni together were far from traditional as late as 1931, when Canadians were urged to try it as a new dish. See: "Cheese makes macaroni better" (CHJ Feb. 1931). In general, cheese was not at all common on the menu of Canadians before the Word War II as illustrated by the following description in an article in a Canadian women's magazine:

> Cheese is so tasty. Canadians are beginning to follow in the footsteps of their European cousins in the adoption of cheese in the everyday menu. (CHJ June 1931)

Now as ever, the existing pattern of "default foods" that people are likely to miss when travelling goes back to what they used to eat as children. My surveys seem to indicate that Russians would miss Russian rye bread, and Canadians crave for Canadian milk. They believe that "in Europe and elsewhere milk tastes different to Canada". As a rule, what is considered as good and proper is actually what one has been used to since childhood. Significantly, in Canada as well as in many other countries it is against the law to sell unpasteurised milk or cheese from unpasteurised milk which reflects on the taste of milk. Probably this is why milk does taste differently in different countries. See for example the comment of a German subscriber to a Russian on-line forum:

> Your Russian milk is not fit to drink – it tastes horrible as if a cow has just been milked. And it is untreated. (Forum Libo)

The same forum features disparaging comments about Russian chocolates (the Russians' pride and joy) and kvass, a national drink which goes back hundreds of years. Germans also note the differences in the meals format – hot food of different types for breakfast is common in Russia, but in Germany many of these dishes would seem an indulgence. Moreover, visitors are amazed at the vobla phenomenon[2] in Russia humourously described in a well-known book by Weil and Genis about Russian cuisine in exile (Weil and Genis 1998).

Significantly, many foods are considered delicacies, not for their taste, but for their medicinal effects. In East Asian markets not only can just about every creature be found—domestic, wild, and endangered—but almost every body part also makes it to the supermarket shelf. According to numerous legends, organs have special properties that can be transferred if eaten. Supposedly, penises of many animals endow the consumers with healthy sex lives, rooster testicles help women stay young, and monkey brains cure neurological ailments. Thus in China the penis of a bull is considered a potent aphrodisiac—the natural version of Viagra. In all these cases there is a symbolic link between a certain quality (i.e. sexual potency) and eating an organ associated with it.

Similar to language, the inherent symbolism of food is subject to a historical evolution, on a par with the ideas about what is suitable for food and what is not: turtle soup, woodcock pies, pies containing a combination of minced mutton, lard, suet, dried fruit, as well as many dishes from offal, so common in medieval recipes, in the 18th and 19th century, or even in mid- 20th century, would be shocking to many a Westerner in the 21st century. Time and again, anthropologists have noted that the food eaten in the past would now seem unpalatable, outdated, or unsuitable.

A case in point would be the following description of a Christmas meal in Canada at the end of the 19th century:

> The roast pig takes the place of the old-time boar's head, and should be garnished with leaves; and if it be a young pig's head, served with a lemon in its mouth. (CHJ Dec.1895, vol.8).

The description testifies to substantial changes in the eating patterns, even with regard to traditional holiday foods. Besides the roast pig, a traditional Canadian Christmas dinner menu in late 19th century also included green turtle soup, salmon, venison pastry, turkey, cheese, celery, plum pudding, mince pies, bonbons, apples, raisins, nuts. Soup as part of a Christmas meal was however described as "a concession to modern prejudice" (Ibid), which is worth noting in its own right. Likewise, note

the description of the serving of roast pig above and the reference to the "old-time boar's head".

Another festive recipe highly unlikely to be used in the 21st century would be that of a Medieval Mince Pie: (recipe transcribed from old English by Ken Tullet, Archivist of Christ Church Priory):

> Make the pastry by seething together lard, water and milk and pouring it into flour. Mix four times as much minced mutton or beef, to suet and dried fruit to make the filling. Season the mixture with cloves, mace, black pepper, saffron and the zest and juice of an orange. Bake the pies in a hot oven. (History of Food in Christ Church 2000 online)

By the same token, the luxurious description of countless dishes served in Russian bourgeois homes can hardly be used as a guideline for cooking now – rather as a comic description of what now looks as a wasteful and profligate approach to different meals and the Gargantuan appetites. This is aptly noted by Tatiana Tolstaya in her review essay (1993) of an English translation of the classic nineteenth century Russian cookery book *A Gift to Young Housewives*. Elena Molokhovets's book, first published in 1901, went through dozens of editions, and lived, together with its author, until the Revolution of 1917. It sold more than 250,000 copies, and the last edition contains almost 4,500 recipes, not counting information and advice on building a house, equipping a kitchen, daily schedules, the science of running a household and entertaining guests, as well as the planning of Lenten and regular meals (there are over six hundred types of non-Lenten dinners alone!), ordinary and holiday fare for servants and masters, and an estimate of the costs of each type of meal. Tatiana Tolstaya comments:

> Where is the creature who rising at dawn, spends two and a half hours roasting chamois in time for breakfast? Or who tosses back a jigger of vodka in the morning and sits down to consume beer soup with sour cream (Rhine wines are served in the middle of breakfast, punch at the end, or the other way around), and with barely time to recover, again drinks vodka or wine for midday dinner (with hors d'oeuvres: marinated fish, smoked hare, stuffed goose or pears in honey, ninety version to choose from) and applies himself to soup with champagne and savory pies (the champagne is *poured* in the soup!), upon which there follows yet another bountiful meat dish, and then a heavy dessert drenched in sugar and fat. After that it's not long until evening tea with five types of bread, veal, ham, beef, hazel grouse, turkey, tongues, hare, four sorts of cheese. (1993)

Incidentally, even the evening tea in Molokhovets' book was far from a simple routine brew because it was served with rum, cognac, red wine, sherbet, cherry syrup, cream, sugar, lemon (Ibid).

Conversely, cultures influenced by Buddhism, which champions the unity and the merging of all existing things have embraced an entirely different approach to food. The following example highlights a very revealing contrast, both in terms of the food choice and the manner different dishes are served:

> And they embarked… upon their Japanese conversation: the difficulties, the enigmas, the linguistic obscurities, the disorientations, the cultural impregnability of Japan; the silk parcels, the screens, the wrappings-up, the slicing, the patternings; the delicacies, the crudities of Japan. …. He spoke also of an evening in a restaurant when he had politely and whimsically enquired (having eaten jelly fish, chrysantemum leaves, strange microscopically thin sections of unknown forms of radish,sea urchin, tiny floating large-eyed spawn) about the edibility of the floral decoration on the table: to his alarm, one of his companions had reached froward with his chopsticks and had, whimsically, elegantly, fastidiously, without comment, extracted blossom after blossom and munched and crunched them up. (Drabble 1987: 184)

Changing Boundaries of Edibility

The attitude to what is food and what is not has always been in a flux. In many ways what is disgusting and what is the best food ever is socially conditioned. The boundaries of edibility have been changing, albeit at a different pace throughout the centuries. Certain items have ceased to be used as food while others emerged as such. In what is arguably the first cookery book in the West "De re coquinara", which appeared more than 1600 years ago, its alleged author, a Roman gourmet Apicius, urges cooks to add honey to almost everything, and the recipes include ostrich and flamingo as befitted the sweep of the Roman Empire. The much more recent examples are turtles and tortoises, which are no longer regarded as food in the West, whereas in the middle of the 20th century advertisements of turtle soup and pictures of turtles were standard in many culinary magazines. Thus, the popular at the time *Chef d'Oeuvre* featured a front page picture of a row of huge frozen turtles with the legend "one hundred frozen turtles parade before Mr Lacroix, the world's leading turtle importer." (No. 2 3/6 1954) The frozen turtles, unambiguously and without resistance interpretable at the time as gourmet food, would cause an outcry of horror now both from environmentalists and the public at large.

See also this extract from Emily Post's *Etiquette* first published in 1922 which indicates that terrapins were just as common on the dinner table as fish in early 20th century:

> Terrapin bones, fish bones and grape seed must be eaten quite bare and clean in the mouth, and removed one at a time between finger and thumb. All spitting out of bones and pits into the plate is disgusting. (322)

The attitude to snail is currently much less ambiguous. This is why Carlo Petrini, the founder of Slow Food movement in his interview given to Alison Leitch remarked that though both tortoises and snails are slow the symbol of the movement is snail, *because snail is food*. (Leitch 2008: 397 ft) – Italics added. By inference – tortoise is not. Pigs' heads, as well as turtles and tortoises, are no longer perceived as food in the West.

Moreover, what currently seems traditional, ordinary and garden was deemed new and exotic as late as mid 20th century:

> A new idea has lately been sweeping a good part of this continent. Along with wiener-in-roll and the hamburger-in-bun, the casual party and the better-class lunch-bar in many places will now offer a pizza pie. And a delightful addition these pizzas are, to the modern eating we all find so happily suited to much of the life we live. Italy sent us the original pizzas. On this side of the Atlantic, the idea has spread rapidly; it has been given a wide welcome and countless interpretations. (CHJ February 1954)

The attitude to offal has undergone a drastic transformation in the West and it is now often top of the abhorrent foods list[3]. Nigel Slater, a well-known English food writer claims that haggis "isn't as Scottish as it thinks it is" and also that "it is not a recipe for the faint-hearted" (Slater 2007: 203) The reason he warns "the gentle reader" about the ingredients for this "dish born out of frugality and the wish to use up every part of the animal" is that it contains boiled lambs' lungs, fat, flanks and oatmeal packed into a sheep's stomach or a length of beef intestine. (Ibid) Animals are rarely served whole, and their innards are not considered worth marketing which resulting in their fading from the inventory of edible foods. In the BBC World Service radio soap *Westways* one of the characters says about the food she has eaten: - "There's no way I can put it mildly: it's offal." Many people are loath to admit they eat such things liver or lungs. Yet older people, from both industrialized and developing nations, remember eating the testicles, cheeks, lungs, kidneys, hearts, and livers of animals. Everything was eaten from the pig but the squeak, the saying went. This is still the case in many countries around the world where people struggle to get enough to eat or abide by age-old traditions[4]. Yet, the broad repertoire of edible animal parts emerging from a subsistence culture in which nothing was wasted is no longer accepted in many Western societies. See, for example:

> "Can you believe that?" Benny was saying, now turned to Kiwi. "Beef tongue. I mean, who eats beef tongue any more?" (Taylor 2001: 386)

Consequently, it is not only turtle soup or dolphin jerky, so popular in Bulgaria in the early 20th century, which are now regarded as sacrilegious, but many easily identifiable body parts. As Nigel Slater writes, "Tripe is revered by many of the older generation, but I honestly can't recall anyone under the age of twenty tucking into it. In fact you can make it 40." (2008: 70)

For most North Americans and West Europeans it is unthinkable to consume body parts used for sex, or in fact, other easily identifiable animal organs. Americans (and increasingly West Europeans) have become distant from the source of their food – hence, the food staple problems which some later accessions to the EU had to confront, such as the tripe soup controversy in Greece.

Notes

[1] See the description of the manufacturing processes of different cereals, their history and dating in Goody (1982:164).

[2] Vobla (a type of roach) is salted dried fish which is served as accompaniment to beer. Quite often it is repeatedly thumped on the table to loosen the scales which invariably causes astonishment and even shock for non-natives.

[3] Also see Chapter 7.

[4] It is noted that Indian cookbooks, for example, stll often assume an attitude to food that was lost long ago in Europe and America.: As recently as 1992 a Goan cookbook instructed its readers: "Cut live chicken and take out 5 tbsp fresh blood." (Cookbooks, Economist 18th Dec. 2008)

What kind of Thanksgiving dinner is this? Where's the turkey, Chuck? Don't you know anything about Thanksgiving dinners? Where's the mashed potatoes? Where's the cranberry sauce? Where's the pumpkin pie?
—Peppermint Patty

Chowder breathes reassurance. It steams consolation.
—Clementine Paddleford

All I ask of food is that it doesn't harm me.
—Michael Palin

CHAPTER TWO

FOOD AS SAFETY, SECURITY, TRUST AND COMFORT

It seems appropriate to start this chapter with Lisa Heldke's description of the comfort and security of Thanksgiving dinner:

> I think I've finally figured out why I like Thanksgiving dinner so much, why I enjoy having it at my house, cooking all the food myself, and eating it – sometimes for days afterward. It's because I never wonder what to fix. I prepare virtually the same meal every year. It's a ritual for me: turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy, squash, and pumpkin and mince pie appear every year. I like it this way. It's comfortable. It's delicious. I do it only once a year. And my mom does it that way. (Heldke 2008 : 327)

The second tier of Maslow's pyramid represents other basic human needs – those for safety and security. The feeling of safety and everything it involves is crucial for human existence, and as noted by A. Maslow it is of key importance for children. It would seem that food and meals can easily fit within this frame of reference. Safety and security needs may range from personal security to a safety net against accidents or illness, as well as financial security. It would also appear that the need for safety and security which may be regarded from different perspectives is closely related to some other needs, for example those for trust and comfort. The security, safety and comfort ensured by eating are due to the fact that they should be regarded as patterned activities.

Since time immemorial, the familiar structure of meals and their format, the repeated patterns of the meals have been a source of stability and thus have provided safety and security. Familiarity breeds trust and trust breeds safety. According to Anthony Giddens, "how far food regimes for the adult are standardised and closely regulated, or left open to individual inclination, depends on the nature of a given country" (1994: 64). In many ways, all human practices should be regarded as patterned activity. M. Visser writes that repetition soothes us and gives us comfort and human beings rejoice in the action of patterning in itself. We eat

whenever life becomes dramatic: at weddings, birthdays, funerals, at partying and welcoming home, or at any moment which a group decides worthy of remark (1991: 20-22). A change in familiar patterns may result in culture shock. This term was made famous by Canadian anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1960) who suggested that a loss of familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse precipitated a feeling of anxiety. Among other excessive concerns which travellers face in an unfamiliar situation he pointed out concern over water or food.

The categories of trust and safety are perceived differently in different cultures. This difference is especially relevant for those born and bred in a certain place and living there all their lives, as opposed to new arrivals. In Canada, for example, old Canadians often use the word "safe" in medical terms – as non-adulterated foods. This meaning of the word safety is less common for many new arrivals. However, quite frequently, the denotation "safe" and "non-safe" food embraces a different phenomenon, that of psychological disturbance because of deluded expectations. There is safety in sameness as illustrated by the following quotation from a popular Canadian cookery book emphasizing the joy of sameness:

> The wonderful sameness of my grandmother's meals - roast chicken on Sundays, shepherds' pie on Mondays, fish on Fridays, baked beans on Saturdays - was a reflection of her era. (Nightingale 1993: vi)

The word "sameness" in this quotation refers not only to different food items but to their sequencing and their format. The desire for sameness is often a manifestation of neophobia, fear of the new, a psychological condition which is manifested by entire communities of people and individuals alike. Mistrust of an unfamiliar is far from uncommon in human society. Perhaps one of the best-known historical examples of rampant neophobia would be the history of potatoes. In the ancient ruins of Peru and Chile, archaeologists have found potato remains that date back to 500 B.C.E. The Incas grew and ate them and also worshipped them. They even buried potatoes with their dead, they stashed potatoes in concealed bins for use in case of war or famine; they dried them, and carried them on long journeys to eat on the way (dried or soaked in stew). The potato was carried on to Italy and England about 1585, to Belgium and Germany by 1587, to Austria about 1588, and to France around 1600. Wherever the potato was introduced, it was considered weird, poisonous, and downright evil. In France and elsewhere, the humble potato was accused of causing not only leprosy, but also syphilis, narcosis, scrofula and, early death. There was so much opposition to the potato that an edict was made in the town of Besancon, France, stating:

> In view of the fact that the potato is a pernicious substance whose use can cause leprosy, it is hereby forbidden, under pain of fine, to cultivate it. (Stradley 2004)

Even during famine potatoes were not welcome. When Frederick the Great (1712-1786) sent free potatoes to the starving peasants after the famine of 1774 they refused to touch them until soldiers were sent to persuade them. Interestingly, even where potatoes are now an absolute culinary must they were at first dismissed as inedible. In Russia the history of potatoes goes back to the great reformer Tsar Peter the Great who published an edict decreeing obligatory cultivation of "the earth apples" as they were then known, but the peasants opposed the move completely. Some peasants thought that accepting "the devil's apples" was tantamount to converting to another faith while others believed that as potatoes had heads (tubers) and eyes they were consuming people's souls. Many people considered potatoes deadly because they would eat bitter green tubers and potato berries which could indeed cause poisoning. The opposition to potatoes lasted until the beginning of the 19th century. (Salaman 1985, Zuckerman 1999, O'Grada 1999, Ploeg 1993, Pelto and Pelto 1983) As late as 1850s most Americans considered the potato as food for animals rather than for humans. In the middle of the 19th century, the Farmer's Manual recommended that potatoes "be grown near the hog pens as a convenience towards feeding the hogs." (Stradley 2004)

Like potatoes, the tomato is native to western South America and Central America. In 1519, Cortez discovered tomatoes growing in Montezuma's gardens and brought seeds back to Europe where they were planted as ornamental curiosities, but not eaten. A member of the deadly nightshade family, tomatoes were erroneously thought to be poisonous (although the leaves *are* poisonous) by Europeans who were suspicious of their bright, shiny fruit. Up until the end of the eighteenth century, physicians warned against eating tomatoes, fearing they caused not only appendicitis but also stomach cancer from tomato skins adhering to the lining of the stomach. Even though both potatoes and tomatoes are now all-round favourites in different cuisines this short overview shows how difficult it is to overcome the ingrained human reluctance to adopt new things.

Some individuals are affected by neophobia more than others. Margaret Visser writes that the philosopher Wittgenstein hated being confronted with a change in his diet: He regarded the effort involved in adapting to it a waste of his energy. Reportedly, Wittgenstein once made it clear to some friends with whom he was staying that it did not much matter to him *what* he ate, so long as it was always the *same.* He settled,

quite happily, during those months for an almost unvarying diet of Swiss cheese and rye bread (1991:43). The above example is by no means isolated. According to L. Heldke, the former American President Gerald Ford always ate the same lunch involving cheese and ketchup, which he made himself (Heldke 2003: 11)

Children are especially finicky, which matches A. Maslow's view of their overall need for security. In the Canadian documentary film My *Brand New Life – A Feast for One's Eyes* directed in 2004 by Ian Fichman, the children's dislikes included the foods they defined as 'gross', 'crazy', 'slimy': eyeball, squid , spaghetti (like worms), pizza with bananas (funny). Their favourites, the foods Canadian children trusted, were classic pizza, sandwiches and pasta.

One of the symptoms of certain psychological disorders is a curious abhorrence of the unexpected. It is perceptively and precisely portrayed in the bestseller. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, a 2003 novel by British writer Mark Haddon. Its main character, Christopher, the 15 year old boy with an autism spectrum behavioural disorder, always eats only yellow foods on certain days or red foods on other days and becomes greatly disturbed if these rules are not followed.

In many cases, especially during social upheavals, food provides the only means of comfort and thus security. When on the eve of WWII Fibich,, one of the principal characters in Anita Brookner's *Latecomers*, takes leave from his parents in Germany who are seeing him off to England on Kindertransport, the leave-taking and all it involves are described through food:

> …they (his parents – IP) had been attached to each other as a mourning group, with no thought for him, or so it seemed, and all that he had to comfort him was a packet of boiled sweets in his coat pocket, in case he felt sick on the boat and the address of a school where a place had been found for him. (1989: 145)

Though for many people visiting new places and eating new foods may mark a holiday and a quest for adventure, in most cases the feeling does not last long. After some time anxiety may set in and a return to default foods is imminent, where possible. See, for example:

> Stephan had accustomed himself to the raw fish better than Liz … but he confessed that one night he had escaped his host's attention and slipped off into the night of Nara **to purchase himself hamburger and chips**. (Drabble 1987: 184) - Emphasis added.