

YOU SAY PLEASURABLE, I SAY POLITICAL: POLITICAL ACTIVISM AND
CULTURAL TRANSLATION IN THE SLOW FOOD MOVEMENT

by

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Abstract

In the twenty years since its founding, the Italian-born Slow Food movement has grown to include over 85,000 members worldwide. Its executive board has members from India, Japan, Kenya, Canada, the United States, Brazil, Australia, and the European Union (EU). Drawing on multi-sited ethnographic research conducted in Italy, France, the UK, and North America, this thesis explores how Slow Food principles and goals are translated culturally. I pay particular attention to how political activism around Slow Food is articulated in Italy and the United States through large conferences for both the public at large and food producers as well as farmers who are part of the global Slow Food membership. I conclude that Slow Food USA more visibly articulates a strongly politically active stance than is expressed by the parent Slow Food International organization in Italy. To bring context to this analysis, I provide a broad discussion of globalization and localization, and the intersections of the two, as well as the connections between food and identity. The ways in which Slow Food manipulates particular aspects of globalization are essential to understanding the movement and as such are explored in some detail.

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Chapter 1 – From Here to There...and There...and There and Back Again

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

-- T.S. Eliot (1944) *Four Quartets*. Quartet No. 4: Little Gidding.

I begin with a warning. If you are expecting a straightforward, academic, perhaps dry Master's thesis, you may want to move on to another in your stack. This is not to say that all the necessary academic ingredients are not contained herein. I am not such a rebel as that. While the following pages may not match the levels of daring, bravery, and all-around excitement Frodo and Sam faced when they traveled into the depths of Mordor to destroy the evil Sauron, I hope that, in some measure, I am able to bring to life my "adventure" of the past year and a half while researching and writing this Master's thesis. That being said, there have been parts of the process, such as writing the research proposal or working through ethics approval that seemed at times like scaling Mount Doom. I also approached the process of ethnographic research with, in hindsight, a fair bit of naïveté and, perhaps, arrogance. Ethnography has been described as messy, and in my case it proved true to form. Before embarking on field research, I read more than my fair share of expert thinking on the ethnographic experience. I found myself particularly interested in papers, such as those contained in Hume and Mulcock's (2002) *Anthropologists in the Field: Cases in Participant Observation*, which recounted disappointing or even harrowing ethnographic outings "gone bad." I read each with interest, but when finished I was sure that nothing like what they had outlined would ever happen to me. My project was fairly straightforward; I was organized and had a fair bit of advanced contact with my hosts at my field location. Ah, hubris. It does

not belong to writ-large, bumbling figures like Bush and Cheney alone. Not only did my fieldwork experience not go exactly as planned, but like many before me I changed tactics midstream and realized that I needed to approach my research in an entirely different way in order to get at the information I had hoped to find in the first place. I arrived in Italy at the beginning of July. I should have known that things would not go as I had so carefully planned when, just before I left Canada, I was told that the person who was going to pick me up from the Milan airport and drive me to Bra (a trip of about 2 ½ hours) no longer worked for Slow Food. No matter, I thought, I'm still on my way to Italy. Twenty-seven hours of travel later, including three flight transfers, a bus ride, and finally a car trip with a Slow Food person driving, I began to question the whole wisdom of fieldwork. I kept reminding myself, though, how easy my experience really was in comparison to that of others. My godparents, for example, travelling to Papua New Guinea in the early 1960s, carrying crates of food, kerosene lanterns, a typewriter, anti-malaria medication, and two young children; all in a small boat equipped with an equally small motor that chugged along, hugging an unknown coastline halfway across the world from the comforts of home. Italy and its promises of cell phones, email access, electricity, and no malarial insects seemed a luxury after all. After several days of intermittent electricity, searching for the Italian word for bedbugs, cold showers in a bathtub that seemed designed for an elf, and sleepless nights interrupted not only by jet lag but also by the hundreds of delivery trucks and cars that barrelled by my bedroom window, I began to think perhaps I'd jinxed things by saying things weren't so bad. They really weren't; I was having a "real" fieldwork experience, I told myself, without the malaria. Upon hearing of the bed bugs and piles of dirty laundry stuffed into the closets by the last tenant, one of the women in the Slow Food office invited me to come sleep on her

couch. People in the Slow Food offices were friendly, but the warm, expansive welcome I had been led to believe awaited me never materialized. To be fair, it wasn't for lack of motivation, but simply because Slow Food employees are so perpetually overworked that someone who wanted to take up more of their time asking about Slow Food must have been the last thing with which they wanted to deal. The employees were so busy, in fact, that I soon realized that while they dealt with huge logistical nightmares and all the little pieces that kept the international face of the organization running financially and visually, the real "business" of Slow Food, the work to change how people think about food and its consumption was happening in the places I had just left. Slow Food happens through its enormous volunteer network. It is the volunteers who communicate what it means to find pleasure in food and community on a daily basis. They do the real on-the-ground work. Slow Food employees keep the organization running, but the conclusion I have come to after my months with what I like to call the "snail army" (the global network of Slow Food members and employees) is that the real work, the real culture-changing work, is accomplished by volunteers.

My research, as the title of this thesis suggests, focuses on the Slow Food movement, an international organization of more than 85,000 members in over 130 countries (Slow Food 2008a) that advocates a more thoughtful, sustainable approach to food than is demonstrated in our current global food system. When I began formulating a research plan, I assumed that the best way to understand the Slow Food movement was to base my fieldwork where Slow Food was born and where its international headquarters remain today, in the small northern Italian town of Bra, just south of Turin. I had been observing Slow Food via various public events in several countries beforehand but I was convinced that to truly understand what was

happening with the movement and how its members were attempting to change cultural beliefs and behaviours I needed to go to the source. In hindsight, I realize that I fell prey to the belief, still commonly held by some anthropologists that anthropological fieldwork takes place in a single location, usually in a non-urban area. While this belief seems to be diminishing, I think there still remains a general feeling amongst anthropologists that multi-sited fieldwork is, as Hannerz (2003) says, in some way inferior. What I failed to realize until I actually found myself on the ground in Bra was that to truly understand the Slow Food movement, I needed to understand it on its own terms, as a *global, multi-sited* organization. As Eriksen writes, “Malinowski himself, the founding father of the single-sited community fieldwork and the synchronic analysis, made his reputation on a study of mobility, [and] translocal connections” (Eriksen 2003:6). I realized that (given the nature of an MA thesis time for fieldwork is necessarily short) I quickly needed to change tack and look at Slow Food from a translocal, global perspective and try to understand how that perspective was being enacted on the ground at a local level.

Viewing my research project in these terms allowed me not only to spread out from Bra to other areas but also to take more seriously my own observations gathered at the very beginning of my research journey when I attended public Slow Food events in England and Mexico. I allowed myself to accord value to these observations not simply as background information, but as valid forms of data that are part and parcel of my entire fieldwork experience and provide important, necessary pieces of information in the quest to understand the development, reach, and future of the Slow Food movement that, in many ways, is a reaction to the perceived effects of globalization. Understanding this reaction to globalization is crucial to conducting anthropological research into the movement. As Hannerz notes,

“what globalisation means in anthropology is rather an increasingly dense web of all kinds of communication and relationships *across borders and between continents*” (2003b:25, emphasis added).

Ultimately, this multi-sited research project has taken me from my own “shire” of the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia to a small town in Shropshire, England (ironically enough the real-life inspiration for J.R.R. Tolkien’s celebrated Shire), thence, to central Mexico, to Vancouver Island, to New Orleans, to northern Italy and France, to San Francisco, back to northern Italy and, finally, to return home to make sense of it all. Six transatlantic flights; countless meals, some amazing, some inedible¹; stacks of train and metro tickets; friendships I hope will last a lifetime; challenges and annoyances; kindness and generosity – these are just some of the ingredients, to use an obvious metaphor, that have gone into this final written product.

Chapter 2 – The Nitty Gritty: Methodology and Theory

Here is where it gets really exciting. Action, white-knuckle suspense, a love story for the ages. Oops. Rewind. Back up. I forgot myself and my promise to stick to at least a semblance of academic form. In this chapter I outline the brass tacks of my research project – where and when research was conducted, what methods were used, how many people were interviewed, and the underlying methodology and theory behind the madness. While this could be dry, no-nonsense information that needs to be noted, I also hope to explore in a meaningful and engaging way my personal methodological and theoretical approach. Perhaps the chapter title should have been “How I Learned to Love Theory and Stop Fighting Hard-to-Read French Theorists,” but that would not be entirely truthful. My antipathy to theory remains despite a frightfully growing, although grudging, interest in it.

The Brass Tacks

Research for this project included a comprehensive review of the literature (see bibliography) surrounding food anthropology as well as the Slow Food movement. This included not only a review of literature analyzing the Slow Food movement but also literature produced about Slow Food by Slow Food. As Eriksen has noted, a multi-sited, transnational study such as mine relies “on a greater diversity of materials than classic ethnography. Although participant observation is indispensable, written sources – often produced in the society in question – can never be ignored” (2003a:14). Fieldwork was conducted over several periods of time in diverse situations. In summer 2007, I spent six weeks in Ludlow, England where I observed, shopped, and volunteered at the public monthly farmers’ market dedicated to local foods, and built relationships with local Slow Food members who would later become official participants in my ethics board-approved research

project. In November 2007, I attended a public Slow Food conference in Puebla, Mexico.

This conference was the first event sponsored by the Slow Food International offices to take place outside of Europe. In May 2008, I spent two days in New Orleans, Louisiana speaking with members of Slow Food New Orleans and other local food system activists. In July 2008, I spent approximately three weeks in Bra, Italy where I volunteered in the Slow Food International offices. My time in Bra included traditional participant observation activities as well as open-ended interviews, on several occasions, with three employees and five Slow Food members. My first three days in Italy were spent attending a private, invitation-only Slow Food meeting focused on the activities of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity. I served as the Slow Food Canada representative at this meeting. Slow Food officials and all of the meeting attendees were aware of my dual role at this meeting as official participant and researcher and consented to my presence. I spent approximately five weeks in Paris, France in July and August 2008 researching awareness of Slow Food amongst residents. During this time in addition to chance surveys of people asking simply whether they had heard of Slow Food or not, I also conducted several open-ended interviews with a baker/food stylist who is active in the food community in Paris.

In September 2008, over Labour Day weekend, I attended the Slow Food Nation conference in San Francisco, California. This included open-to-the-public events such as a farmers' market and speakers' forum as well as invitation- and ticket-only events. During this event I attended all public events, three ticket-required speaker presentations, an invitation-only VIP event, and conducted two open-ended interviews with Slow Food executive-council members.

In October 2008, I attended Slow Food's two largest and arguably most important events in tandem, *Salone del Gusto* (Taste Salon) and *Terra Madre* (Mother Earth). I served as a Slow Food Canada representative at Salone del Gusto, the public food show organized by Slow Food that showcases Slow Food-approved and sponsored foods from around the world. I volunteered my time in the booth representing Red Fife wheat, a Canadian heritage wheat that is part of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity's Ark of Taste project. I also served as a Canadian delegate to Terra Madre, Slow Food's bi-annual meeting of approximately 6,000 producers from around the world. During the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre, in addition to participant observation, I conducted four open-ended interviews. I have been an official member of Slow Food since October 2008 and also took over as leader of the Slow Food Okanagan *Convivium*² at that time. In addition, I have volunteered my time on the Slow Food Canada Ark of Taste project since March 2008 and was appointed by Slow Food Canada's President as the pro-tem Chair in November 2008. We assume that this appointment will be officially confirmed in May 2009 at Slow Food Canada's annual meeting.

Finding a Theoretical Comfort Zone

Anthropological theory is a complicated beast. Post-modern, feminist, social-constructionist, post-colonial, interpretive, political economic, symbolic, Marxist (and marxist with a little "m") – as a neophyte researcher, I often wonder how I can possibly wade through the sea of theories available. This is especially difficult if you think, as I do, that deciding on a theory before going into the field is perhaps at cross purposes with keeping an open mind and a commitment to sharing, to the fullest extent possible, the voices and perceptions of the people who help to inform my research project. When theory takes centre

stage in a descriptive account, it is “more apt to get in the way than to point the way, to tell rather than to ask what we have seen” (Wolcott 2002:178). Wolcott also recommends using theory if it works; but if it makes more work, then move on to more productive work instead; easily said by a full professor with numerous publications and honours to his name, less easily addressed by a graduate student during a thesis defence. What exactly then is the right answer? How do I find a place where both I, and the academic system I work within are comfortable? How do I find a place within the academic system where I can be comfortable with my theoretical choices while also meeting my discipline’s requirement for theory-informed research?

As a researcher with literary leanings, I am immediately at home with the writings of one of anthropology’s preeminences, Clifford Geertz. Geertz views culture as semiotic, with people spinning those famous “webs of significance” (1973). Human beings spin intricate webs of meaning around food, making an interpretive approach to its study a natural fit. Food often serves as metaphor for other things in our lives. Just think of some of the many ways it is used in the English language to express ideas – something that is “fishy,” leaves a bad taste in your mouth, or causes you to eat your words. Food’s meaning is so much more than simple nourishment. It can mean comfort, family, or security, celebration or mourning, inside and outside, everyday and exotic. In addition, for someone who feels a bit allergic to theory, Geertz’s treatise is about interpretation, not theory set in stone. It fundamentally does *not* say that one must view this thing or this behaviour as “A” and that thing or that behaviour as “B”. Geertz was a “master of distinctions who recoil[ed] at typologies, grand theories, and universal generalizations” (Shweder and Good 2002). A Geertzian theoretical approach involves analysis and *interpretation* without any specific, defined slots that particular things

fit into. Geertz advocates viewing and interpreting action (that is to say “cultural” behaviour, beliefs, etc.) from the actor’s point of view, within the framework of how they themselves define and interpret their actions and lives (Geertz 1973; 1974; 1983; 2000; Ortner 1984; 1999). Today this may seem like an “of course we do things that way”-kind of idea, but it was a radical departure from accepted anthropological theory at the time Geertz first proposed it.

As that fraught word, “culture,” is beginning to appear here on an increasing basis, I want to say something about my use of the word before I go much further. Like Geertz, Ortner and others, I too believe that there is a place for the word culture in anthropological discourse. I also believe something, no matter how amorphous and difficult to explain, called culture exists; not as a physical “thing” we can grasp, but as a concept. While the word has become filled with implications – interpretations and semiotics, if you will – that range from rancorous post-colonial definitions to confused, ambiguous meaning never really explained, I do believe that there is a real concept behind the word and so I will use it throughout this paper. Therefore, it is important to define what *I* mean by “culture.” I assume, in a nutshell, that culture entails what we as human beings learn in order to be able to make sense and meaning out of our lives and our world. It is our framework (of meaning, experience, ideologies, viewpoints, you name it) that we call upon to interpret our reality and make sense of it. Anthropology helps to enable conversations across cultural lines. In an increasingly globalized world where it is more and more difficult, in Geertz’s (1988) words, to “get out of each other’s way,” good anthropology can increase the possibility for intelligent discourse between people very different from each other. Without an intelligent human discourse between the various people of the world our future in this world is called into very real

danger. Anthropology's task, therefore, becomes one not of increasing irrelevance as has been suggested by some (see Lewis 2008 for an excellent discussion on this topic), but one with more relevance than ever.

However well a Geertzian framework seems to fit an ethnographic study of the Slow Food movement, it fails to address several important issues. Sherry Ortner, a student of Geertz at the University of Chicago, has spent much of her career constructing a theoretical framework that improves upon, but doesn't dismiss, Geertz's interpretive theory³. Ortner's framework provides a vehicle for understanding how power and agency come into play and how the intersections of the two might be interpreted (Wardlow 2006:4-5). This is especially useful when attempting to address the kinds of intersections that are inherent in the Slow Food movement – those of food, identity, global politics, transnationalism, and locality. She notes that while Geertz didn't systematically elaborate a theory of social action, he did firmly plant the actor at the centre of his theoretical model (Ortner 1984). This is important because it allows for the inclusion of agency, a missing but all-important ingredient in Geertz's framework. Geertz addresses symbolic systems but not necessarily how they are reproduced or changed through action or agency. As Ortner remarks, "it is our location 'on the ground' that puts us [anthropologists] in a position to see people not simply as passive reactors to and enactors of some 'system,' but as active agents and subjects in their own history" (1984:143).

For Ortner and others the concept of agency led to the development of practice theory. Practice theory "restored the actor to the social process without losing sight of the larger structures that constrain (but also enable) social action. It 'grounded' cultural processes – discourses, representations, what we used to call 'symbol systems' – in the social relations of people 'on the ground'" (Ortner 2004:3). Practice theory provides an analytical

framework for exploring culture change. Using historical events as a filter, it helps to describe the complex relationships between what people do, the symbolic meanings those same people invoke, and the distribution of power in society (Karp 1986; see also Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Ortner 2004). Practice theory focuses on the ways in which power relationships are ambiguous and contradictory (Ortner 2004:7). It attempts to understand these ambiguities and place them in social, historical, and political context. This is easier said than done, especially in the midst of events that often take place under precarious or contentious circumstances. This makes practice theory best done in the context of a full historical analysis. As Geertz wrote, quoting Kierkegaard, “Life is lived forward but it is understood backwards” (1995:166). Ortner further explains that although we can form hypotheses, or make guesses, about what the long-term implications of present-day practices and events might be, their effects in terms of social reproduction and/or transformation can really only be seen or interpreted in hindsight (2004).

The concept of agency, both on the part of the dominant group and on those lower in the hierarchy, is essential to understanding how cultures are maintained or transformed. Practice theory not only explains the why of cultural systems, behaviours, and beliefs but also the ever-illusive why and how of culture change. Agency is absolutely central to the explanation. Ortner writes, “Agency is not an entity that exists apart from cultural construction... Every culture, every subculture, every historical moment, constructs its own forms of agency, its own modes of enacting the process of reflecting on the self and the world and of acting simultaneously within and upon what one finds there” (2004:57). Every person has agency but this does not mean that we are each completely free, unfettered individuals. We are always engaged in enacting agency in concert with others, within social

relationships with family, friends, teachers, and others. There are always existing relationships of power, inequality, and competition that are intertwined with personal agency. Therefore, our analyses must focus on *both* actor agency and large-scale social and cultural forces (Ortner 2004). A practice theory framework is one in which neither individuals nor social forces have more impact than the other but in which there is a dynamic, powerful, and even transformative relationship, “between the practices of real people and the structures of society, culture, and history” (2004:133). Historical context and agency are key, as I will explore in detail later, to understanding the development and future of the Slow Food movement.

Beyond Theory: The magic is in the writing

However well it may seem to work, a theoretical framework that only addresses analytical explanation is not enough. If I subscribe to practice theory, I have something to help me explain what I think I see but not necessarily a guide to how I should explain it. I need to look for theoretical as well as practical approaches with which I feel comfortable. These choices can’t help but be personal. Paradigmatic positioning is *always* a personal decision and it may be difficult to fully, “scientifically” rationalize why we choose one over another. For me the way I write is an essential component of my overall methodology, no less important than a theoretical framework; writing and theory are not necessarily separate. I return for a moment to the concepts of power and agency as they relate to textual production and the idea of who speaks for whom. People resist political domination, even in its textual representation, through agency. Ethnographers write about the lives of people who actually live. All of these people exercise agency of one degree or another. If we ask questions they don’t like, they might choose either not to speak with us at all or to fabricate answers they

think might please us, perhaps to embarrass us when we take the answers as truth. If we share our interpretations with the people we study, they also have an opportunity to push back against what they may see as incorrect analysis or unflattering presentation. To imbue ethnographers with the power to “completely distort or exclude the voices and perspectives of those being written about” gives the texts we produce, and us, a much greater power than we have (Ortner 2004:59). Ortner goes so far as to say that it feels “grotesque to insist on the notion that the text is shaped by everything but the lived reality of the people whom the text claims to represent” (2004:60). Geertz also criticizes the trend towards describing the people being written about as “co-authors,” saying that by doing this we, as ethnographers, unfairly put the burden of authorship on someone other than ourselves. “If there is any way to counter the conception of ethnography as an iniquitous act or an unplayable game, it would seem to involve owning up to the fact that, like quantum mechanics or the Italian opera, it is a work of the imagination, less extravagant than the first, less methodical than the second. The responsibility for ethnography, or the credit, can be placed at no other door than that of the romancers who have dreamt it up” (1988:140). As ethnographers we have much to answer for, not necessarily for our forebears but most certainly for the texts we produce, for both good and bad.

Early examples of ethnographies, like those of Lévi-Strauss, Malinowski, and Benedict (despite the criticisms we can justifiably lay at their door) remain compelling, well-written, and engaging pieces of writing.⁴ When anthropology was criticized from both within and without the discipline for its role in Western colonialism and capitalism, it retreated into itself in many ways and ethnographic writing became lost in self-conscious analysis, written only for other anthropologists so as not to risk the ire and criticism of outsiders. Gone were

vivid verbal descriptions and beautiful, lyrical, literary language. Gone also were the essentialist, all-knowing truth claims from scientists on high – a step in the right direction but with a loss of something precious. To take stories of peoples' lives, with all the drama and daily monotony thrown in, and make them boring, difficult reading is a lot of work; and not very good work at that. People's stories are such an essential, valuable, and meaningful part of the human experience, to minimize them or remove them entirely for the sake of postmodernist angst and relativity is, I think, one of "modern" anthropology's greatest mistakes.

With Clifford and Marcus's groundbreaking *Writing Culture* (1986), ethnography as text, with all its political, historical, institutional, and personal implications took centre stage. The essays in *Writing Culture* challenged the field to critique and read ethnographies as literature, not just as "scientific" pieces of writing.⁵ Geertz, however, tackled the idea of "texts" and ethnography as literature more than ten years before, in his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), when he broached the idea of anthropological writings as "fictions," in the Latin sense of the word *fictio* as something made, something fashioned. Determining what good, lasting anthropological writing looks like and why some is more convincing and compelling than others is not an easy task. Geertz's answer was to explain that, "ethnographers need to convince us that not only have they truly been there but also that if we, the reader, had been there too we would have seen, felt, concluded the same things" (1988:16). In addition, he notes the advantage of focusing attention on writing as well as on fieldwork. By doing so, we gain a better understanding of what we are reading as well as the difficulties entailed in conducting fieldwork – from language difficulties, to loneliness and physical discomfort, to exercising great patience in searching for "invisible needles in infinite

haystacks” (1988:24). All of this is well and good, but a focus on writing must not only look at lyricism or description, but clarity. Writing that is accessible only to the academic elite is not, in my opinion, good writing. As Wolcott says, “to warrant the claim, anything labelled as research must be accessible to others” (1999:192). Taking the idea further in later work he says, “The ability to write well is now recognized as an essential element in fieldwork. *Our accounts are meant to be read.* ...If nobody reads our studies – virtually in their entirety – our efforts are doomed to obscurity. *We need not apologize for efforts to make our work interesting*” (2002:199, emphasis added). I hope that if I have accomplished anything, it is to write something that not only explains and analyzes, but also entertains to some extent and gives some sense of where I have been and what I have seen, and perhaps most importantly, the people who have shared their lives and experiences with me. Slow Food members well understand the deep connections that human beings have to food and are eager to share that knowledge. To understand Slow Food and its members, then, it is important to have a basic appreciation for how food is tied to identity and how we as human beings use food as a tool in constructing who we are, as individuals and as much larger groups.

Chapter 3 – You are What You Eat: The Food and Identity Connection

Think of what you ate for breakfast this morning. Was it cold cereal and milk eaten sitting at a table? Or maybe you wolfed it down standing at the counter as you grabbed your travel mug with coffee for your morning commute. Maybe you're more comfortable with a bowl of hot white rice, some *miso* soup and a piece of grilled fish with some vegetables, sitting on the floor at a small, low table. A piece of baguette with butter and jam and a large cup of coffee with lots of milk? How about pita, feta cheese and some briny olives eaten to a cacophony of automobile traffic and voices in a language you don't understand from the street below. Or maybe you skipped breakfast, not because you didn't have time to eat it but because your children needed the little food in the house more than you.

What you ate (or didn't) and where you ate it may seem uncomplicated enough, yet essentially it is something that is both simple and complex. All human beings need to eat and yet we do not eat the same things the world over. Our food choices define us, both at home and far away. Food is a day-in, day-out constant need, thus of especially strong social and symbolic significance. Food is nutrition, but it is so much more. It is a powerful means of communication, connection, as well as an influencer and creator of obligations. Many people use it as an offering to the dead. It wards off, distracts, or keeps spirits content. We welcome strangers with food and drink, establishing trust as well as creating an obligation of amity in return. Food is religion – the body and blood of Christ in a small, tasteless wafer and sip of red wine. Food is power – if you can regulate production, distribution, and consumption you can control people. Food is magic – hot cross buns are eaten for good luck; red beans and sticky rice ward off dangerous demons in Japan. The food we eat can reveal our class in society or what class we want to belong to. Combinations and ways of using ingredients help

to clarify the “social destination” of food. For the elite, a food with humble origins becomes ennobled; for example, garlic (originally only eaten by peasants) stuffed into a roast goose becomes a delicious treat for the nobles who were to eat it, the luxury of goose modifying the peasant-nature of the garlic (Montanari 2007:38).

Let me return to breakfast and ask you now to think about how you feel when you have to eat something completely foreign. Does the idea of starting your day with a mug of tea with plenty of milk and salt, coupled with some boiled lamb with lots of fat and a hot piece of deep-fried dough appeal to you? If you ate that everyday instead of what you are accustomed to, would you feel less yourself, somewhat distanced from where you consider home? The food we eat is integral to our self- and group-identity. When traveling, eating unfamiliar food can be an exciting adventure but as anyone who has been away from home for an extended period of time knows, sometimes you really just need to eat something quintessentially “Canadian” or “Mexican” or “Japanese,” however we define that. Being in England, Mexico, Italy, and France didn’t challenge my food comfort zone considerably; however, I am intimately familiar with the kinds of food fantasies being away from home for a long period of time can engender. After living in Japan for more than a year, there was nothing I wanted to eat more than pancakes with maple syrup, with a close second place being a hamburger and French fries (something I would normally never eat). My father used to inspire vicious delight in my brother and me with tales of the foods he had to eat while in the field in Micronesia – fermented breadfruit, fresh breadfruit, fire-baked taro, boiled taro, mashed taro, chopped taro, steamed fish, baked fish, fish in soup, fish in stew, fish and taro stewed together. How he must have longed for anything but fish, taro, and breadfruit, for anything that tasted of home. If we can long for foods as we long for lovers when separated

from them, consider, then, what happens when food habits and identities are genuinely threatened, whether by economic changes, migration, or even famine. How do human beings maintain their identities when they are under assault from outside forces and internal changes? It may be as simple as immigrants eating a breakfast that makes them feel at home even when in a wildly foreign place. For people whose lives have changed due to impacts outside their control – such as changes to the way they must make a living because of larger socio-economic forces which impact the very fabric of their daily life – people must find more creative, often unconscious, ways of maintaining identity.

The small Alpine village of Bruson, Switzerland provides an example of this. Once a largely self-sufficient, agricultural village that traded and/or sold products such as wine and cheese to neighbouring villages, Bruson has had to transition towards a wage-earning economy as the Swiss economy has changed following World War II. Bruson remains one of a handful of villages in its canton that still practice agriculture without the aid of modern machinery, tying their processes to the past in an effort to “preserve” cultural traditions (Gibson and Weinberg 1980:113). This very “preservation” of the past also keeps Bruson alive today because it makes it an attractive tourist destination for visitors who want to experience “authentic” Swiss peasant village life. Brusonians work to maintain distinct cultural markers that differentiate them from other villages in the region (Gibson and Weinberg 1980). They do this through wine, specifically the production and rules surrounding the consumption of wine. These rules help to define protective boundaries between insiders and outsiders (112).

Only “insiders” understand and follow accepted social rules around drinking. Private (amongst family) and public drinking in Bruson is a symbolic medium for validating social

contracts that help to bind Brusonian families together. One repays debts, such as small services and favours, to other villagers through offering wine (116). In Bruson only insider men, not women, drink alcoholic beverages at the café and very rarely does any local dine there. Outsiders of both sexes, including tourist women who drink alcohol or tourists who dine at the café, are recognized by their breach of the unspoken rules (117). Insiders always order white wine from the barrel (because that is sure to be locally made wine) and very rarely drink to excess. All of these rules, and others, surrounding wine drinking serve to maintain a system of symbols, meanings, and identity, in the face of strong pressure to change, all of which defines who belongs and who does not.

Economic and social changes have had an impact not only in rural communities like Bruson but also in metropolitan areas. In Italy, historically women's identity and power within the family has come through food provisioning. As Italy's economy changed in the mid-20th century, women began to work outside the home in large numbers, leading to dramatic changes in their influence over their families (Counihan 1988:51). Carole Counihan's (1988) study of contemporary Florentine women shows that an important component of their identity remains the traditional role of family food provider, however working outside of the home no longer allows for as much time spent on cooking and nourishing the family as in the past (54). Contemporary Florentine women still gain much of their self-identity through their roles as caregivers, especially around food; yet, they also build identity through their work as wage earners outside the home. Through this work outside the home, however, women lose the control and power they once had in defining and satisfying their family's needs through food. This in turn endangers the Italian mother's sense

of self because she still believes her primary role is to provide everything for her family, especially home-cooked meals for her children (59).

As with the example of Bruson, food acts as one of the most visible ways through which group identities are defined and reinforced (Buckser 1999:191). This is especially true in religious groups that have specific dietary laws. Jewish dietary rules have become one of the most important ways of expressing contemporary Jewish identity and membership (193). Andrew Buckser explains that for the Jewish community in Copenhagen, dietary laws, despite not being practiced by most Jews in the city, remain one of “the few symbolic systems which all of them recognize, and through which all of them can express their Jewish identity” (195). The manner in which this is expressed varies widely: Some are strictly kosher and only buy meat from one of two kosher butchers in Copenhagen and will not eat anything that might not be kosher. Others are kosher at home but don’t observe kosher practices outside the home. Jewishness is something that becomes private for some and for others something that they insist on maintaining at all times. Keeping kosher at all times comes with a high price, as people tend to be then singled out on social occasions “attending as not only guests but also Jews, a different category of person” (197). “The complexity of kosher symbolism makes every group meal a symbolic event, a place in which to negotiate and express the nature of Jewish community” (200).

If food can express the nature of a Jewish community in Copenhagen, it can also be an important aspect in expressing a national identity. Food – from production to consumption – is not only a building block for self-identity but for larger group identity, even shoring up nationalist ideologies. Rice grown in Japan is rigorously protected through government subsidies, the rice serving as a symbol of Japan itself since rice grown outside Japan, even

the same variety, is not considered Japanese, let alone as delicious as that grown on Japanese soil. In France, the *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC) system subsidizes and protects numerous products, from cheeses to wines, which are uniquely French and therefore hold superior value over products from outside of France. Italy maintains a similar system, the *Denominazione Origine Controllata* (DOC). While we may all be able to conjure up images of “national” foods, the way in which these foods become symbols for nationalism, especially in countries made up of diverse regions with diverse food habits and histories, is complex and relies on multiple historical, socioeconomic, and political forces.

For hundreds of years culinary literature has played an important role in establishing the concept of a national cuisine. By translating the abstract ideology of nationalism into the familiar, comfortable confines of the home kitchen, cookbooks and other forms of culinary literature, such as cooking magazines, help to make the concept of nationalism through food meaningful (Pilcher 1998:2). “Cuisine illuminates the complex interplay between regional and national identities, as well as providing a view from below of how women and the lower classes have influenced nationalist ideology” (3). National identity and patriotism are ultimately built through participation in the national community and what better way to do that than through food. Food is of the Earth, although today it is easier and easier to forget that fact. Nevertheless, because food comes from the soil and the sea (or lakes and rivers) it is inherently tied to place, making a tie to region and further, nation, a natural one. National identity is practiced through consumption of particular foods. Thanksgiving turkey, eaten with family and friends, is an annual ritual that ties Canadians (and our neighbours to the south) together. Consuming traditional New Year’s celebration foods, *o-seki ryori*, in Japan is an essential part of the important celebration. Japanese eat these special dishes only once a

year, at home with family members, tying each person to a single “Japanese” identity because of the food rituals they share.

Mexico, a country built with two contrasting food histories, one from the Spanish conquerors, one from the indigenous peoples, provides an excellent example of just how a national cuisine is built. Beginning in the 1920s, the revolutionary governments of Mexico adopted an ideology that exalted indigenous people. Artwork by revered national artists like Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco glorified corn, a staple indigenous food, and associated indigenous heritage and revolutionary martyrs with Mexican nationalism (Pilcher 1998:90). Even while the government glorified corn for nationalist reasons, it also campaigned to replace corn with wheat as the dominant agricultural crop. Wheat production could be controlled and therefore taxed but corn was seen as the root of self-supporting, communal life and therefore a barrier to modernization. Nevertheless, Mexican peasants, or *campesinos*, resisted efforts to transform their lifestyles and move them from corn to wheat (92).

Once corn moved from a subsistence crop to a market commodity, the *campesinos* who had held onto corn as their staple, life-giving food, were incorporated into the national economy whether they liked it or not and corn, embodied in the tortilla, took centre stage in the Mexican national cuisine. Even as corn declined in the countryside and peasants began to eat more processed foods, it became a symbol of nostalgic nationalism for the urban middle class (121). Popular “peasant” corn-based dishes like enchiladas, tamales, and tortillas “were appropriated into the national cuisine as a means of transforming elements of lower class and ethnic culture into symbols of unity” (124). Despite its symbolic importance, the tortilla and other corn-based Mexican foods are still considered by some to be food for the poor. This is

an assumption of not only the upper classes but also of the poor themselves. Tortillas may be rejected by the poor in favour of processed white bread because the bread is considered the food of a higher socioeconomic class. Today, well-to-do peasants and working class Mexicans consume, on average, 20% of their calories from processed foods (120). Processed foods like white bread, sodas, candies, and chips are associated with affluence and symbolic of upward socioeconomic aspirations. It is ironic that the reverse, consumption of foods that were once eaten only by the poor – for example, *baccala* (salted cod mashed with potatoes), whole grain sourdough breads, lobster, veal – are now idealized foods of elites.

In India, the construction of a national cuisine has been essentially a postcolonial one. The national cuisine emerging in India today is one in which regional cuisines play an important role, rather than one that seeks to hide its regional or ethnic roots. With the middle-class diaspora across India largely due to the rise of white-collar industries, a professional and commercial bourgeoisie has grown up in towns around the country. Women who have moved with their husbands far from their native regions are constructing a new middle-class ideology and consumption style that cuts across older ethnic, regional, and caste boundaries (Appadurai 1988:5-6). As in Mexico, cookbooks that integrate foods from regions across India play an important role in building the concept of a national cuisine. The movement of recipes in the new urban middle-class is one sign of the loosening of historical caste boundaries. Food boundaries are dissolving more rapidly than other institutions, such as marriage, because eating provides a variety of events tied to particular contexts, thus eating in a restaurant is different from what is seen as appropriate at home (Appadurai 1988:6, 9). “The seductiveness of variety...as an important part of the ideological appeal of the new cookbooks, masks the pressure of social mobility, conspicuous consumption, and budgetary

stress for many middle-class wives” (10). The idea of a single Indian cuisine has emerged because of, rather than despite, the increasing articulation of regional and ethnic cuisines (21). This merging of what once were distinctly regional, unique foods into a single national cuisine helps to unite people under a common umbrella of being “Indian” first, and “Rajasthani” or “Bengali” second. This “nationalization” of food can be seen as a trend against localization or regionalization but I would assert instead that it is actually part of the same process. Local traditions are kept alive in the process of being embedded within a larger national context. With access to information easier than ever, boundaries blur and people absorb and integrate a variety of foods (as well as many other habits and ideas) into their lives. This changing of food habits in India can perhaps be seen as just one facet of the changes we have seen occurring around the world through the forces of globalization. Globalization is not a simple matter of outside forces causing changes around the world; it is a complex web of local and global interdependencies that are not always what they seem.

Chapter 4 – The Local is Going Global. The Global is Going Local.

Although at first it may seem counterintuitive, the strengthening of local identities and global mass-market capitalism can be seen as two sides of the same coin (Castillo and Nigh 1998; Lewellen 2002; Wilk 1999). We see this through the common cultural concept of insider vs. outsider, local vs. foreign; “our” culture vs. the powerful and dangerous “other.” It is through these juxtapositions that the concepts of each are created. One cannot exist without the other. Richard Wilk views the contrast of globalization and localization as “an extremely potent drama because it has no solution – it is an eternal struggle, where each pole defines its opposite” (1999:248). According to Ted Lewellen, globalization doesn’t simply bring homogenization but also strong localization (2002:9). And it is only at a local level that we can truly understand globalization. “We must study it at the level of real people who imagine new lives, make plans, travel, form networks, assume identities, and socialize their children” (26). Globalization brings fragmentation and differentiation. The “local” has to be produced; it does not just exist on its own. It must also be constantly reinforced, though, because of outside pressure to conform to global norms or expectations.

Localization of food is not just the product of local inhabitants, but is fostered by transnational corporations, particularly Western fast-food restaurants, as a way of gaining acceptance in communities. Eriberto Lozada, Jr. asserts (2005:163) that some of the most crucial decisions (such as the development of new products and marketing strategies) affecting transnational corporations are made and then modified within the confines of local communities, with the participation of local people, and in recognition of local social structures and ideologies. Globalization processes are not simply the imposition of a single ideology or model *onto* other people but also the present opportunities for communities not

only to assert and affirm their identities but also to recast the global according to locally particular and meaningful ways (Caldwell 2005:183).

Whether it is an example of localization fostered by a transnational or localization created by the community, Western fast-food outlets in Moscow have also been appropriated by the local people. Muscovites see McDonald's as an intimate and sentimental space in their personal lives. Family celebrations are held at McDonald's and the restaurant also plays a role in discussions about what it means to be Russian today (Caldwell 2005). Muscovites have "drawn McDonald's into the very processes by which local cultural forms are generated, authenticated, and made meaningful" (181). By going through this process of domestication McDonald's has been localized. The restaurant now plays an important role as a location for meaningful events that customers consider uniquely Russian. In this way, we can begin to see that global fast-food outlets like McDonald's do not necessarily mean the same thing in every country.

As Muscovites have adopted McDonald's as their own, so have Beijing residents, in the process transforming the fast-food experience into something uniquely Chinese. Yunxiang Yan (2005) explains that the way Beijing residents experience McDonald's is an example of how customers may care less about the food and more about the cultural messages it delivers; it is not about the food but the experience the restaurant offers. The current cultural value of modernity is expressed in Western fast-food restaurants; so, although many adults dislike the food, they appreciate their children's fondness for the food because it exemplifies their good taste in something modern (88). In Beijing, American fast food is fast only in the service. The dining experience is meaningful and therefore too important to rush. "As a result, the American fast-food outlets in China are fashionable,

middle-class establishments – a new kind of social space where people can enjoy their leisure time and experience a Chinese version of American culture”(94). Localization, or specification, is produced in the consumption process. So we see Western fast-food outlets in Beijing that are unique to Beijing because they have been “domesticated,” or localized with the input of local people, including local managers and consumers (Lozada 2005:174).

In contrast to the adoption of American fast-food into accepted cultural patterns by Muscovites and Beijing residents, North Americans have adopted and transformed the cuisine that grew up along the western border of the United States and Mexico. Southwestern cuisine in the United States has become the site of simultaneous appropriation and resistance. According to Amy Bentley (1998), Southwestern cuisine has evolved from the exotic “Other” to a familiar favourite through the reframing of the food’s context and presentation, as well as through recipe adaptation. Southwestern-style food is now mainstream American food, produced by fast-food outlets and food industry giants located far outside the southwestern United States – one of the biggest selling brands of salsa, Old El Paso, is produced in New Jersey. Bentley views the mainstream appropriation of Southwestern cuisine as more than simply a popularity context. Citing the extraordinarily strong ability of food to communicate ideas, social status, and power, she says, “the popularity of Southwestern cuisine can be convincingly interpreted as an act of cultural hegemony, an appropriation of borderlands foods in the hopes of neutralizing the power and voice of people, particularly Latinos, in the region” (243).

However, appropriation is never a *fait accompli*. Southwestern cuisine also can “provide a means of ownership and self-identity” for Mexican-Americans (Bentley 1998:239). Events like communal tamale and tortilla making can be sites of resistance to the

dominant Anglo culture and can help Mexican-Americans maintain and strengthen their cultural identity. These community events are largely centered on the women who do the work, and help to reaffirm their roles within the community and the family. Events like tamale and tortilla making help to develop a sense of unity and community as well as reward women dignity and respect for their cooking skills. How Mexican-Americans experience Southwestern cuisine, especially how they produce and consume it at home, is very different from the experience and meaning ascribed to it by non-Mexican-Americans (Bentley 1998). Like the Italian women Carole Counihan describes, the Mexican-American women Bentley writes about are also performing their identity through preparing and cooking particular foods. By providing food for their families, they reinforce the expected female cultural role of nurturer. This push-pull between the role of nurturer and career woman is not limited to the Italian and Mexican-American women Counihan and Bentley describe, of course. In Canada, one need only to review magazine covers prominently displayed in racks at the checkout line at grocery stores to see the conflicting messages the media conveys. Headlines tell women how to cook a delicious and nutritious meal for their family in only thirty minutes while also promising a sure-fire way to lose those “last ten pounds” and dress right for office success. Reconciling the roles of mother, career woman, slim and attractive wife – none of these identities becomes clearer or easier to fit together as women across the globe receive multiple messages about who they should be.

With growing food globalization, “what one eats is increasingly muddled and who one is becomes subject to questioning” (Srinivas 2007:87). Balancing tradition and change, borrowing cultural forms and hybridizing them, resisting cultural imperialism and homogenization – all complicate identity (87). The image of local farmers protesting outside

an American fast-food outlet is very familiar, witness French farmers dumping loads of manure outside the door of a McDonald's or Czech students marching against and eventually vandalizing various fast-food restaurants in Prague. However, our assumptions about what generates these protests are not always correct. They are not always attempts to preserve local identity in the face of assaults from global forces, but can be and usually are, something different than what we might initially assume.

The entry of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) in Bangalore, India led to picketing by local farmers. Journalists and social scientists assumed it was the local – “fresh, healthy, authentic, and pure” – versus the global – “the bad, the unhealthy, inauthentic, and mass produced” (Srinivas 2007:90). However, when asked why they were protesting, the farmers responded that they were protesting because KFC's “genetically modified organism” (GMO) chickens didn't taste as good as native, organic, free-range chicken. For farmers it wasn't about globalization versus anti-globalization but about the “right to have differences in taste” (90). Globalization in Bangalore, in the sense both of the spread of Indian foodways throughout the world and the arrival of foodways from elsewhere, is framed by existing experiences and history. The reaction to the globalization of food in Bangalore has again been two-sided – the growth of a connoisseurship of both local and/or ethnic/caste-based foods and of foreign foods. The globalization of food in Bangalore is about conscious identity construction. This allows Bangaloreans to function in “a multidimensional global space by constructing selves that engage both the local and the global” (102).

When confronting “foreign” food, which includes not only food from outside of India but also food from other regions of India, Bangaloreans exoticize it. The “seductive media images of National Geographic, the travel channel, and tourism brochures for the Western

market” (95) transform non-Bangalorean food into adventure and Other. When eating foreign food, the diner is expected to be knowledgeable as to its authenticity, cultural background, and ingredients. Food is a way that a diner can demonstrate appreciation and awareness for the world outside as well as a sense of adventure, all considered morally valuable traits (2007).

In contrast to embracing foreign food to demonstrate an openness and understanding of other cultures, Tulasi Srinivas (2007) explains that “gastro-nostalgia” is the reflective and self-conscious return to eating the food from one’s particular ethnic, caste, or kin group. Specific caste and ethnic foods are normally produced in small, local production. However, an industry of prepared, packaged “nostalgia” foods has grown up, led by local cooperatives of Bangalorean women. These cooperatives produce caste- and ethnic-specific foods for a large corporation that ships the foods globally, providing “local,” “authentic” food to East Indians around the world. Invested with a narrative of history and a utopian ideal of a lost past, it doesn’t matter whether the packaged food is eaten in Delhi or Des Moines, it remains an authentic food experience. It also serves to reinforce cultural identity by “retrieving the self through the eating of the cuisine of one’s caste, ethnic group, region, and locale” (100). Srinivas quotes an East Indian mother living in the West who says, “By not eating pizza and burgers, we are maintaining our Indian tradition. That is important for the children to know that we are Indian, we eat Indian food” (100). The irony that the Indian food her family eats is distributed globally does not seem to be an issue. Identity, then, becomes something that is constructed and changeable and is defined in part by one’s food choices.

The move towards localization, regionalization, and specialty types of foods can be seen as an attempt to recreate a time before mass production and mass consumption existed

(Roseberry 2005:141). As Theodor Bestor (2005:18) has noted, “globalization doesn’t necessarily homogenize cultural differences nor erase the salience of cultural labels. Quite the contrary, it grows the franchise. In the global economy of consumption, the brand equity of sushi as Japanese cultural property adds to the cachet of both the country and the cuisine.”

The same developments that shape globalization of markets and transnational consumerism also shape the reverse. The trend towards handcrafted, artisan chocolates in France reasserts the value of locally constituted identities and commodities “as a source of distinction and authenticity in the face of rapid change and the perceived homogeneity of transnationalism” (Terrio 1996:70). Susan Terrio believes it is the politics of cultural authenticity in market globalization that enables “genuine,” locally produced products to be maintained, revived, and/or reinvented precisely because their value lies in their “localness” and “authenticity”. In post-industrial societies, crafts such as French artisan chocolates “can serve as a metaphor for an alternative set of cultural values and work practices in contrast to the dominant norm” (74). By continuing these practices, or in some cases by reviving, traditional forms of production, people reassert their cultural distinctiveness and identity. French *chocolatiers* purposely capitalize on the association between contemporary artisanal production and the idealized image of a “traditional” France. This association evokes images of a simpler, better time when small family businesses made quality chocolates within a community of like-minded master food producers. By purchasing handcrafted, artisan chocolates French consumers demonstrate a level of connoisseurship that accords them social distinction. Both consumers and producers of these artisan chocolates are preserving their “cultural heritage” and evoking an uninterrupted continuity with the past (69, 71).

Globalization processes and the reaffirmation of local identity exist in concert with one another. As Rapport (1997) notes,

At the same time as there is globalisation...and movement across the globe, between societies and amongst cultures, as never before...there is also 'culture compression': an insistence of socio-cultural difference within the 'same' time and space; a piling up of socio-cultural boundaries, political, ritual, residential, economic, which feel experientially vital, and which people seek to defend and maintain (71).

Local communities respond to products from outside with the production of their own products, or with the adaptation of outside products to fit their own images. This is more than simply passive resistance by clinging to traditional behaviours. People constantly redefine their identities in a new global context. In doing so they often adopt new elements from outside but also hold onto elements of local tradition that they believe are essential to their identity. Some may reinvent the past and create new traditions to shore up their defined identities. The irony is that in attempts to resist global forces, people cannot help but react to them. There is no way to remain untouched by them, but the reverse is also true. Global forces are themselves enacted at a local level. As we are confronted with pressures both external and internal, our identities, especially around food, are under constant threat. However, just as we accept that culture itself is constantly evolving and changing, we also must accept that identity works in much the same way.

It is very important, however, to avoid the tendency to assume that the local cannot exist without the global or is simply created in opposition to the global. We are so accustomed to thinking in terms of dualism that it is important to question whether everything is created in opposition. Indeed, much of the research on globalization and localization explores the oppositions of the two, or the merging of the two (often referred to as "glocalization," a word that I abhor and feel is simplistic and thus refuse to use), seeming

to forget that the local has always existed, well before the notion of the global entered into the equation. We need to ask what kinds of local practices might be expressed in the absence of an opposition to the global or if there are global practices, even, that are unique in and of themselves. No matter what answer we come to, examining what, how, when, where, and why we eat the foods we eat provides, perhaps better than almost anything else, valuable insight into how human identities, and our larger world, are shaped and evolved.

Chapter 5 – A Great and Glorious Tale of a Boy, Some Sausages and a Bunch of Snails

Once upon a time, in a land shaped like a swashbuckler's boot, there lived a little boy named Carlo. Carlo arrived during a time of momentous change and upheaval in the land. Just a few years before, the long-awaited end to a great and devastating war finally came. And although the terror of the war had ended and people once again felt safe, much of the joy and innocence that had once existed in the world was gone forever. However, human beings are surprisingly resilient and enough years had passed that people were beginning to feel hopeful again.

The part of the boot where Carlo lived, once the playground of little princes and princesses, was now a centre of industry, populated by hard-working men and women who were helping to bring something called “progress” to the land. Factories and their lines of workers churned out automobiles and leather shoes and bags and a very delicious chocolate and hazelnut spread. But all was not well, despite outward appearances. For hundreds of years, workers had been toiling for the princes and princesses and all their royal relatives, building their castles and growing their crops, milking their cows and collecting their honey, growing old and bent from hard work and bad food. It doesn't sound fair, does it? It really wasn't but because the princes and princesses were, well, princes and princesses, they made the rules, even if they were very unfair. But then things changed and wars were fought and in many lands just like Carlo's there were no longer any princes and princesses, or at least if there were *they* didn't get to make the rules any longer because we know what happens when they do, don't we?

Unfortunately for the workers in Carlo's land, new pretend kings and queens appeared, but now they were called “Captains of Industry” and the rules they made weren't

very fair either. So the people rose up again, and they fought with other workers around the world to make rules that were fair for everyone, especially the workers. Just for clarity's sake, let's call the workers Reds. Red is a good colour, don't you think? It's strong like the blood that runs through every person's body no matter who you are – prince, princess, or cheese maker.

So, while Carlo is growing up, the Reds are still fighting for the workers, although now they don't often fight with guns but with words and laws. They write great proclamations they call manifestos, often full of big, flowery language that call seriously and stridently for things like equality among the workers of the world, for safe working conditions, for wages that would not only feed a family but also allow children to go to school instead of slaving away in a factory. The manifestos are full of very good ideas but unfortunately the Reds in Carlo's land are a bit boring – they don't believe in having fun, really, and often eat nothing but sausages. Sausages are certainly delicious but not at every party, if you can call the gatherings of Reds “parties” for no one ever does anything but talk and grumble, although they do sing a lot. But they are not the kinds of songs you can kick up your heels and dance to, certainly not the kinds of songs a little boy like Carlo might gleefully sing. Nevertheless, the Reds in Carlo's land could actually have meetings and write laws for the workers. Across the ocean, in another much larger land, the Reds had to hide under beds and meet secretly. In that land across the sea, they were known as the Red Menace and were known to eat babies, not sausages. Sounds terrible, doesn't it? But that's another story, for someone else to tell.

While Carlo is growing bigger, the Reds struggle for fairer rules, and not quietly, let me tell you. Sometimes they all stop working, all at once, and everything goes to pot. The

trains don't run and the garbage doesn't get picked up and the cars don't leave the factory. Still, when Carlo is bigger and getting ready to make his way in the world, the Captains of Industry are still the richest men in the land and, while they no longer make all the rules, they make a lot of them. Everyday people still work very hard and don't have as much as the Captains; the Reds tell the people that someday, if they keep fighting the good fight, those Captains will lose the fight and the workers will finally rise up. Carlo and his friends aren't so sure. And they really wonder about a group that doesn't believe in fun and, while sausages are good, don't eat much of anything else but sausages.

Across the oceans, another war is being fought, for that is what human beings seem to do. In this war, a giant and powerful land (the same land where the Red Menace devours innocent babies) sends its young men to a much smaller land of steamy green jungles to kill other young men, women, children and old people, too. The giant wants to make sure that the Red Menace doesn't spread and they try to convince everyone around the world of its danger. But at Carlo's new university, and many across the world, the students don't agree with this war. So the year that Carlo arrives at school, his fellow students take control of the university, joining thousands of others across the land.

But Carlo doesn't join them. You thought he would, didn't you? Yes, I know. But Carlo has to work, driving across the land selling candy. It's not that he doesn't agree with his fellow students, but he has to pay the rent. He is there in spirit, though, with his fellow students who called for life, in all its glory and passion and pleasure; the opposite of those boring gatherings of Reds and their dried out sausages.

Around this time, Carlo and his friends travel to a neighbouring land and there they learn something very important. They learn, or are reminded because deep down they already

knew it but had forgotten, that good food and wine are tied to the land where they are made and the land is tied to the people who live there. This tie between land, food, and heart is an important one. What was your favourite food when you were little? What do images of chocolate chip cookies still warm from the oven conjure up? How about an ear of corn dripping with butter? Maybe, if you were lucky, you bought it directly from the farmer who had picked it just that morning. Do you see? Can you begin to feel the connection between you, what you eat, and, just maybe, the soil where it came from? This is what Carlo and his friends remember and learn on this fateful trip. They return to their land after their great adventure determined to teach others about the pleasure of food and wine and good company that they decide might save the world.

Save the world through the pleasure of food? Preposterous! Certainly that is what the Reds are saying. But you see, Carlo and his friends think differently. Delicious food paired with jovial conversations amongst friends shouldn't just be for those with piles of money, for kings and queens and princelings and Captains of Industry. Workers rights aren't just about safe working conditions and fair wages, Carlo and his friends shout. They too have the right to good food and the pleasures found in life. Carlo and his friends want to show those old Reds and their friends that people are entitled not only to fair wages but also to good lives filled with fun and pleasure. And it is a lesson that many in the land shaped like a swashbuckler's boot seem happy to learn.

But Carlo and his friends are fighting an army much bigger than theirs. This army tells people that if they did more and more everyday they will gather more and more riches. But to do all this extra work, people must take time from other things they used to do; like cooking and eating. And then part of this army from across the oceans, launches a dangerous

attack on the land shaped like a swashbuckler's boot. It sets up business in one of the most important cities of the land, opening a restaurant right in the middle of a plaza in which people have gathered to talk and eat and enjoy life for many hundreds of years. This new restaurant teaches people that food should be ready almost immediately and eaten quickly, all the better to save time for more work.

Carlo and his many friends fight back, not by dumping great truckloads filled with what comes out of cows' bums at the restaurant's front door (although some people think that's a good idea), but by setting up tables outside and eating bowls of pasta slowly. And then, with a nod to what they learned from the Reds, they get together with friends from other lands and they write a manifesto. It looks like a manifesto, it even sounds like a manifesto, but the words, when they come together to form ideas, are unlike any other manifesto. This manifesto of Carlo and his friends, announces the creation of a new sort of club, one that denounces the sort of life the army from across the ocean promote. Instead of more and more things packed into the day, instead of life lived with speed and lack of attention, instead of a life without pleasure, this manifesto calls for a life of enjoyment, where people slow down and notice things again, where they sit down together and enjoy food made by a person, not a machine. And this new club, this movement, takes as its mascot the ordinary snail. The snail, as Carlo tells people, his eyes sparkling and his voice so very convincing, moves slowly and calmly through life eating all the while.

Well, Carlo and his friends, with the snail as their mascot, spread the ideas in their manifesto to more friends. And they tell their friends who tell their friends and so on and so on until eventually, the group of people who want to live by the philosophy of the snail are from around the world, across oceans and deserts and jungles. They speak different

languages and eat many different things. But they all believe that enjoying food is so important that if more people understood, the world just might be saved. But as things will happen, the bad guys are not so easily vanquished and they have grown in strength so that today the Earth itself is endangered. Carlo, his beard now more grey than brown, and his growing snail army, still believe that food is the answer. Now, though, manifestos that support the pleasure to be found in food and good company are not enough. Carlo and his friends have returned to those Reds and their manifestos about workers rights. For food is made by workers – farmers, cheese makers, shepherders, and more – and to save the world, the people who eat the food have to be reminded about where their food comes from and who makes it. Everyone needs to understand that connection between soil, food, and heart that Carlo and his friends learned so long ago, if he and his snail army are to save the world. So that is their mission today. Perhaps you know a member of the snail army or are one yourself. If so, then I don't have to tell you that there is no "The End" to this, for it is still being written.

Chapter 6 - Slow Food and the Context of History

I deliberately chose to start with a fairytale-like story about Slow Food's origins to highlight how so much of what has been written about the Slow Food movement in the popular press and in much academic work approaches the history of Slow Food in an almost mythic way. Many choose to refer to the birth of the Slow Food movement with an apocryphal pasta "eat-in" staged in 1989 in front of the new McDonald's restaurant that had just opened at the base of Rome's Spanish Steps. Little reference is made to the roots of the movement that go much farther back than 1989, roots born in the Italian Communist Party and the social and political upheavals of the late 1960s. Not only does much of the writing about Slow Food's beginnings miss out on an even more interesting story but it also lacks the context of the world in which the movement was born and in which its founders came of age. As with any social movement, let alone human history in general, it is impossible to build an understanding of the Slow Food movement without a specific historical context in place. I don't want to repeat all the details of Slow Food's history outlined in the previous chapter, albeit in different language, but it is important to delve further into some historical context.

After World War II, the Italian Communist Party dominated the Italian Left. As Fabio Paresecoli (2003:29) has described so well, "among the Italian Left a 'cathocommunist' attitude prevailed, which united Catholic morality with Communist ideology". Pleasure, through food or really any other conduit, was viewed with suspicion and seen as a bourgeois luxury, or in the case of sex, a sin. Along came the late 1960s and notions of free love, equality, and emancipation from the social strictures of preceding years brought inevitable conflict between young and old members of the Left. The generation that took part in the 1968-69 student movements across Italy "felt that power should be creative, and that political

engagement within the Left should not also automatically imply the acceptance of Party morals” (31). As Andrews (2008) notes, “The quality of cultural life, including access to, and appreciation of, food and wine, was a democratic question. The pursuit of pleasure was everybody’s concern” (9). From 1968 onward, the official Italian Communist Party was viewed as an anachronism by many of its younger members and, more and more, the Italian Left was dominated by a radical leftist culture. Some groups took truly radical militant stances, such as the anarchistic Red Brigade, which used violence, including kidnapping and murdering former Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro, to try to accomplish their goals. Most, however, were content to criticize the Communist Party as outdated and in need of a radical overhaul.

Slow Food’s founding members are men of that 1968-69 student protest generation. They came of age during the peak of radical leftist culture in Italy. Many of them were raised in the Piedmont region, one of the centres of the Italian workers movement, and were active members of the Italian Communist Party. Too often, I think, they are seen now as always having been well-to-do middle-aged men intent on the search for pleasure in life. This is much too simplistic a view to take and one that risks ignoring history and context. To truly understand the Slow Food movement, we have to understand its full history and the context in which it was born. It is also very important not to underestimate the central role Carlo Petrini played and continues to play in the movement. He was the driving force behind its foundation and has served as the organization’s president since its inception. Slow Food members and employees alike treat him with jocular reverence and although the organization operates on general democratic principles, it is still one where what Carlo says goes.

Don Carlo and His Merry Band and the Birth of a Social Movement

During the Slow Food International Congress held in November 2007 in Puebla, Mexico the local hosts of the meeting ceremoniously presented Carlo Petrini, Slow Food founder and President, with a plaque proclaiming all the good things he had done for the community and naming him “*Don*”

Carlo Petrini, or Sir Carlo Petrini, with all the honourific sense of the word wholeheartedly included. The term *Don* brought laughter that was at the same time derisive and delighted from the crowd of Slow Food employees in attendance. Other Slow Food members clapped enthusiastically at the moniker. It was a title that was clearly appropriate and appreciated for this crowd of people who had gathered to



Figure 1: Carlo Petrini at the 2007 Slow Food International Congress in Puebla, Mexico. © Tabitha Steager

discuss the future of the Slow Food movement, almost 20 years into its official “birth.”

Carlo Petrini was born in Bra, a mid-sized town in the Italian region of Piedmont, approximately 40 kilometres south of Turin. The year is in some debate, as those who do quote a year (see Leitch 2003 and Kummer 2002) give either 1948 or 1949 but most do not mention a specific year at all. Regardless of the exact year, Petrini’s political, cultural, and social leanings were formed during his upbringing in Bra, where he continues to live and where the Slow Food International offices are located. Bra and the surrounding region have strong historical connections to the Italian aristocracy (in fact the University of Gastronomic

Sciences founded by Slow Food is housed in a restored Savoy castle), as well as deep working-class traditions, especially of the leftist-Catholic persuasions mentioned earlier (Leitch 2003:449). The region is also renowned for its culinary products that include platinum-priced truffles, Barolo wine, hazelnuts, and cheeses.

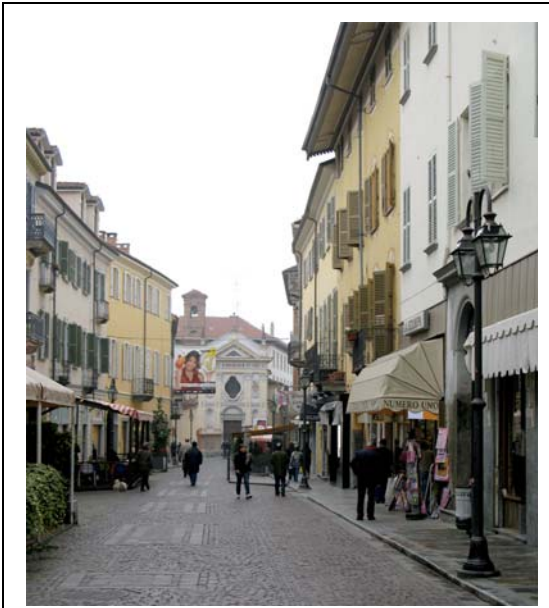


Figure 2: Via Cavour, Bra. © Tabitha Steager

When Petrini was 19, he enrolled at the University of Trento in the sociology department, known for training some of the more prominent radical leftist leaders of 1970s Italy (449). One would assume that he would be right there with his fellow students who occupied the university in 1969. However, early on Petrini showed an inclination to spur direct confrontational protests. Instead, he occupied himself as a candy salesman in the region while also volunteering at various social services

agencies. He collected used goods from people's basements and sold them at bin sales, raising approximately \$175,000 (in today's dollars) towards opening a school for illiterate adults (Petrini and Padovani 2006:26). When he was 26 years old, he and his friends started Italy's first independent radio station, *Radio Bra Onde Rosse* (Radio Bra Red Waves). According to Petrini and Padovani (2006) it was the court ruling around the legality of this station that ultimately resulted in the liberalization of independent broadcasting in Italy. With the same group of friends, Petrini opened a co-op grocery in Bra and a political bookstore in Alba. During this time he was also working to build a career as a food and wine writer.

The violent terrorist tactics of the extreme Left from the late 1970s to the late 1980s effectively brought an end to the Italian Left and by the mid- to late-1980s a new Italy had been born. The economy was booming and the country becoming one where “yuppies were considered role models, where economic results were more important than the social issues, and where all sense of community and solidarity disappeared in an unprecedented rat race” (Parasecoli 2000:32). Then in 1991, the Italian Communist Party transformed into the Party of Leftist Democrats, “tightening its connections with the European New Left and definitively renouncing Communism as a guiding ideal” (32). Amongst this new Left, one led by young intellectuals, a sea change taking place in the attitude “towards what might be termed a new politics of pleasure, was certainly also linked to more general transformations within Italian society” (Leitch 2003:450). “These years saw the emergence of a new social paradigm and the parallel growth of new privately oriented individualism; this created the conditions for the advance of commodification and the affirmation of post-industrial capitalism” (451).

Amidst these death knells of the old Italian Left, two publications about food and wine were born. In 1986, the Communist daily newspaper *Manifesto* began publishing a monthly magazine supplement called *Gambero Rosso*, edited by Stefano Bonilli. *Gambero Rosso*, literally means “red shrimp” and, not incidentally, is the name of the tavern where Pinocchio is swindled out of his gold by the Cat and Fox in the classic Italian morality tale. *Manifesto’s Gambero Rosso* “aimed to change the frequently gloomy and sullen image of leftist initiatives” and “protect Pinocchio’s real-life counterparts – innocents abroad as well as trusting customers at home – from finding themselves at the mercy of padded bills, lumpy beds, gruff service, watery wine or mediocre food” (Parasecoli 2003:33).

Around the same time Petrini and friends began publishing *La Gola*. Literally, *gola* means both “throat” and “gluttony” in Italian. However, as Alison Leitch explains, “to be *goloso* has a more positive connotation of craving pleasure with a particular food... because *gola* implies both ‘desire’ and ‘voice’, it suggests that desire for food is a voice – a central vehicle for self-expression in Italian cultural life” (2003:448). *La Gola* was published for a much smaller audience than *Gambero Rosso* – a few thousand copies versus thirty-five thousand – but became the arena for a new organization led by Petrini and his friends, *Arcigola* (*arci* is an acronym for the Recreation Association of Italian Communists) (Parasecoli 2003:33). Arcigola’s task was to combine that which had previously been thought incompatible by the Italian Left, such as excellent quality and affordable prices, enjoyment and health, delight in life’s pleasures and social awareness, quickness and lazy rhythms” (Petrini 2001:12). As Carlo Petrini remembers, Arcigola “demonstrated to all and sundry that we were not just a bunch of people out for a good time, that we were dedicated to a project that would have an impact on everyday life and the way people function in the worlds of production, distribution, and consumption” (14). Leftist intellectuals like Carlo Petrini saw food “within a conceptual framework in which collective enjoyment, sharing, and community became the main points of reference” (Parasecoli 2003:34-35). Carlo Petrini and Stefano Bonilli, the editor of *Gambero Rosso*, would rechristen Arcigola as *Slow Food* and both would be instrumental in setting up a meeting in Paris on 9 November 1989, where a manifesto was written and signed by “representatives of the countries participating in the international movement for the defense of and the right to pleasure,” marking the official birth of the organization (Parasecoli 2003:33).

Chapter 7 – You Say Pleasurable, I Say Political

We are enslaved by speed...

May suitable doses of guaranteed sensual pleasure and slow, long lasting enjoyment preserve us from the contagion of the multitude who mistake frenzy for efficiency.

Our defense should begin at the table with Slow Food...

Slow Food guarantees a better future...

– *Excerpted from the Official Slow Food Manifesto (Petrini 2001:xxiii-xxiv).*⁶

The choice of the manifesto format used to give birth to the Slow Food movement in 1989 is an important one. The manifest format was certainly familiar to those who were members of the Communist Party in its various incarnations in Europe and the use of this format by the founders of Slow Food communicates more than merely the words it contains. Parkins and Craig (2003:53), quoting Lyon, note that to “write a manifesto is to announce ones participation, however discursive, in a history of struggle against oppressive forces. The form must be understood therefore as more than ‘plain talk’: the manifesto is a complex convention-laden, ideologically inflected genre.” Thus, while on the surface the official Slow Food manifesto as a whole seems a somewhat innocuous and naïve document, one that doesn’t take into account realities that exist outside of the lives of middle-class, European, leftist intellectuals, it immediately announces through its format that it is something else. The evolution of Slow Food from a movement promoting the universal right to pleasure to one that today advocates for sustainable agriculture and fair pay for food farmers and producers is a development that is not as surprising as it seems.

Like the story of Slow Food itself, rather than digging deep into the contents of the manifesto, we dig instead into the philosophies of the men behind it, we begin to see that

pleasure is not simply hedonistic pleasure. According to Parasecoli, from the very beginning with Arcigola, Carlo Petrini positioned pleasure as “liberating and disruptive, a force that can shake every structure from its base” (2003:35). The liberation Petrini sought was to come not only from that particular judgmental and oppressive mindset of many Italian Leftists but also from a liberation that sought to “undermine the corporate vision of food as pure commodity, as a source of money with little or no connection to the most basic human needs” (35). In Petrini’s own words, “There is not a single Slow Food project that doesn’t link pleasure with responsibility and food with awareness, that doesn’t bring to mind a philosophical banquet in which eating and debate about the resources and values of the human race go hand in hand” (2001:71). Carlo Petrini, founder, leader, and spiritual centre of the movement, has always articulated Slow Food’s focus as something much more than an eating club for dedicated foodies.

This is not to say that Slow Food is a militant political organization; far from it. As Petrini focused on raising money for social causes and doing work on the ground rather than participating in student protests when he was a young man, the same philosophy informs how Slow Food operates today. He says, “Our choice is to focus our energies on saving things that are headed for extinction [be it a slow dinner with family or a particular type of apple], instead of hounding the new ones we dislike” (2001:26). Slow Food seeks to “protect and promote local and sustainable systems of ecology, agronomy, and gastronomy by building viable local markets” versus the impossible task of directly taking on the giant food multinationals (Chrzan 2005:122). Most action occurs at the local level through member-volunteer efforts because, as Carlo Petrini learned early on working in his local social organizations, it is at the local level where the most effective change occurs. This kind of

approach makes sense when considering the alternative – taking on the global food system itself. As Pawlick has noted, “By its very nature, international corporate agribusiness cannot be ‘reformed’, or pressured into becoming a reliable, responsible source of healthy food and a protector of the environment because they have only one goal: profit” (2006:203). Thus, *alternative* approaches to the food system, like the one advocated by Slow Food, seem to be the best way to address the large-scale problems of a large-scale system. Instead of making changes to the current system, we must create an entirely different system, throw out the old and bring in something new, albeit a new system that embraces the biodiversity and the *slower* approach to life found in an idealized past. “The answer, at least in the short run, is not to confront it but to go around it...The way to defeat corporate power is to make it as irrelevant as possible to our daily lives by setting up our own, alternative systems and insulating those systems effectively while they grow and mature” (209). Slow Food members, along with people who support other alternative approaches to the food system (organics, small-scale farming, Community Supported Agriculture schemes, etc.) are part of a global network that “comprises a repertoire vast in economic scale, political intentions, and cultural overhaul” (Wright and Middendorf 2008:2). The potential for change is significant, although as all Slow Food members and employees I spoke with noted, it is an uphill battle with multiple challenges, and successes, in countries around the world. While the scope of this project did not allow me to gather detailed knowledge about how Slow Food operates in each and every country, particularly from a political perspective, I was able to gain an understanding of just how varied political expression can be once the movement leaves Italy.

Political Expression in the Home Territories: Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre

In Italy, as mentioned previously, there is a focus on things Slow Food “likes” or approves of versus direct political confrontation. In contrast to its early focus on the “right to pleasure,” Slow Food has evolved over the past five years to advocate a new food production and distribution model that Slow Food proposes, one that is *Good, Clean, and Fair* where good equals respect for sensory quality, clean equals respect for environmental sustainability, and fair equals respect for the producers of the food we eat (Petrini 2007). *Good, clean, and fair* food is food that is local, traditional, and made with artisanal methods by small producers. Foods that can be traced to and are distinctive of a particular geographic region are also good. Foods that are produced using environmentally sustainable methods and that treat animals humanely are clean, thus also promoted by Slow Food. In addition, producers must earn a fair, living wage from their work in order for their product to be a true Slow Food product. For example, chocolate bars made in France by a small producer using methods passed down for three generations would seem to fit the Slow Food criteria for good, but if the cacao is sourced from an industrial source or from cacao plantations that use child labour, then the chocolate’s “goodness” would be called into question. Large-scale production from industrial behemoths like Nestlé, Kraft, and others are not supported, but neither are they officially boycotted. The international organization does lobby the European Union (EU) directly about food production regulations and standards but the overall sense of political expression and engagement that I witnessed in Italy differed significantly from what I witnessed in the United States. I draw my comparisons primarily between Slow Food Nation, the large-scale Slow Food event held in San Francisco in early September 2008, and the joint Salone del Gusto/Terra Madre events held in Turin in October 2008. My impressions come not only from being a participant and attendee but also from the wide

variety of email communications issued by the Slow Food Nation office and several online discussion boards before and after the event took place.



Figure 3: Queue barriers for Salone del Gusto ticket purchases, early in the morning on the first day of the show.
© Tabitha Steager

To better understand Slow Food Nation, it is important to understand from where much of the inspiration for the event comes. Slow Food Nation is Slow Food USA's version of Slow Food International's epic-scale Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre events, held concurrently every two

years in Turin, Italy. Salone del Gusto is open to the public and takes place in Turin's Lingotto convention centre, built around and on the site of the old Fiat factory. It also makes use of the Lingotto Oval next door, a second enormous building built to house some of the larger stadium events (including the opening ceremonies) of the 2006 Turin Olympics. The scale of Salone del Gusto is difficult to describe. The 2008 event attracted 180,000 visitors, a slight increase over the 2006 conference (Slow Food 2008a). Entrance fees ranged from €20 per day to €60 for a five-day pass, although Slow Food members received 50% off these prices, 11-18 year olds paid €12, and children under ten years of age entered free of charge. Slow Food does not release financial numbers, but my conservative estimate of funds

generated from entrance fees alone (not trying to estimate the exhibitor fees or funds from the two large corporate sponsors, Lurisia water and Lavazza coffee) is approximately €2 million. Sheer numbers alone are impressive, but not enough to describe the event.



Figure 4: The Parmigiano-Reggiano booth. © Tabitha Steager

A series of cavernous halls house thousands of food vendors – aisles and aisles of cheeses, continuous rows of *salumi* (the Italian word that encompasses the entire range of cured meats made in that country) hanging from booths, a twenty-foot high replica of a wheel of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, a two-story booth dedicated to San Daniele prosciutto, an entire sector devoted to all things sweet, a cordoned off *enoteca* with walls of Italian wines and vendors selling bar snacks like stuffed, fried olives and full meals of pasta to go with whatever you choose to drink, full-size restaurants serving food specific to various regions of Italy. During peak visitor times the entire space is clogged with a seemingly never-ending sea of people; traveling from the Oval where I was volunteering to the main Salone del Gusto hall next door could easily take 45 minutes during busy times. Early in the morning, before

the conference opened, it took about ten. To my fellow North Americans and me, the crowds often seemed like a serious fire hazard but the Italians seemed largely unconcerned.



Figure 5: Terra Madre entrance, Lingotto Oval. © Tabitha Steager

Salone, as it is called by those “in the know,” takes place over five days, Thursday through Monday, from 11:00 am until 11:00 pm. In addition to the food halls, Salone also offers hundreds of workshops to the public, ranging from the highly-sought after *Tre Bicchieri*⁷ wine tasting event to “Taste Workshops” on honey, coffee, the rare black pig of Lazio, rum from the West Indies and French Guiana, bitter American beers, and ice wines. In 2008 prices for the Taste Workshops ranged from €16 – €35. Attendees could also participate in the Master of Food certification workshops, culminating in a certificate proclaiming expertise in such things as “Daily Food,” a workshop that taught aspiring Masters how to shop for good, clean, and fair food and reflect on the environmental, economic, health and social consequences of their food purchases.



Figure 6: Gabon delegate, Terra Madre. © Tabitha Steager

For the first time, 2008 Salone ticket holders also had access to a number of free public lectures held as part of Terra Madre. This was an important change as prior to this, Terra Madre had been the province of official delegates and observers only, with its more political and social justice related forums not open to the public. Slow Food launched the first Terra Madre in 2002 as a way to actively champion communication and learning between producers from around the world. Delegates at Terra Madre are selected through a complex process involving nominations at the local convivium level, which are then sent to Italy

for review. Approved delegates are then officially invited by Slow Food International to attend the conference. It is no small feat to put together Terra Madre in conjunction with Salone del Gusto, arguably one of the largest food shows in the world, but logistically it makes sense. The revenues from Salone, along with grants from the Italian government, fund Terra Madre in its entirety. Funding for Terra Madre is no small matter. Every delegate is offered free accommodation for five nights in addition to three full meals per day during that time. For delegates from so-called developing countries, the support is even more generous. All of their travel costs, including airfare, are paid and Slow Food also organizes and pays for all the necessary Italian visas so delegates can enter the country. In 2008 close to 8,000 Terra Madre delegates descended on Turin. I'm unclear of the percentage of those who were fully

funded, but based on observation only, I would make a rough estimate of at least one third of delegates.

It is impossible to miss the spectacle of all of these producers from around the world. Fresh-faced, tall American university students in jeans wander the convention centre floor alongside Tibetan yak's milk cheese producers in traditional dress. One day I watched as two Guatemalan men in brightly embroidered shirts made of rough white cotton paid two women in vivid yellow and green African tribal dress⁸ to dance and sing in the middle of the hall. Another day I walked into the washroom and ran headlong into a group of women painting large white dots in intricate patterns on their faces, arms, and chests and wrapping their heads and bodies in brown, green, and blue batik-dyed cloth. Outside on a small patch of lawn a circle of American students practiced a complex series of claps, leg slaps, and shouts in preparation for their presentation on the Slow Food on Campus⁹ initiative in the United



Figure 7: Tibetan yak's milk cheese, curds, & whey.
© Tabitha Steager

States. Long banks of headphones and transmitters line the centre wall of the Oval. Each lecture is offered in multiple languages, the interpreters sitting in small glass booths at the back like a United Nations meeting.

In addition to the many opportunities for ad-hoc interaction and sharing amongst delegates, Terra Madre also offers many

panel sessions, or as Slow Food calls them, “Earth Workshops.” In 2008 topics ranged from “Potatoes and other tubers” to “Participative development models” to “Saving Amazonia by using the foods of the forest” to “How much can I sell it for?” In total there were thirty-three sessions offered exclusively to Terra Madre delegates. There were an additional fourteen Terra Madre lectures open to the public, held in the Salone del Gusto area. These public lectures addressed the major issues of Terra Madre – food security, climate change, local economy, seeds, and biopiracy. In general, they were more politically focused than anything else at Salone. Some of the lecture titles were, “Seeds and rights,” “Food is sacred,” “No to GMOs,” and “Food security, the challenges of climate change and bioenergy.” Many of these addressed the political, philosophical, and social implications of the current industrial system and its contrast, an alternative food system with Slow Food values as the guiding principles. As a volunteer manning the booth promoting Canadian Red Fife wheat at Salone, I was unable to attend any of the lectures but many attendees readily shared their impressions with me. Vandana Shiva led the standing-room-only-panel on climate change. Shiva spoke at a number of public and Terra Madre delegate-only lectures and each was filled, or overfilled, to capacity. I think this speaks not only to her great eloquence as a public speaker, for she is incredibly compelling and passionate, but also to the desire for clear, targeted, and at times militant and aggressive, talk about the world food crisis. Terra Madre provides a forum for the more political side of Slow Food. As Kelly Donati has noted, “The undertaking of Terra Madre reflects an acknowledgement from Slow Food that defending the right to pleasure alone will never rectify the inequities of the global food supply” (2005:239). Peace (2008), commenting on the 2006 conference, also realized that, “Terra Madre is the political flagship of Slow Food, the major occasion on which cosmopolitan leaders and ordinary members

encounter one another, the most significant form in which its politics and ideology are elaborated” (31). Despite being the real flagship event for political engagement, I left both Terra Madre and Salone del Gusto feeling that the number of forums where more strident political talk happens, where *specific* calls to action are made rather than somewhat wide-ranging pronouncements, was limited. In general Slow Food works to educate attendees through a soft, gentle approach. If one wishes only to focus on the pleasures of food, there are ample opportunities at Salone for just that. It would be easy to attend the event and come away with little in the way of politically thought provoking experiences. If someone wanted a bit more, there were opportunities but none of them radically challenged attendees with the stark social justice realities of our global food system, for example, or what must be the damaging environmental impacts of a food show that draws close to 200,000 people from around the world.

Political Expression Across the Pond: Slow Food Nation Makes a Statement

In contrast, Slow Food Nation came out punching. Perhaps this is not the most apt description, as it was not a major political demonstration with thousands in the street, but nevertheless from the very beginning organizers positioned it as a food event that would highlight not only the value of taking pleasure in eating but also the dramatic inequities and serious problems with the food system in the United States. Katrina Heron, chair of the Slow Food Nation board, wrote in a piece in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (August 17, 2008) that ran the week prior to the event,

No one knows less about food than [Americans]. We, the American people, having inherited an extraordinary and unprecedented wealth of native and immigrant culinary traditions and knowledge – a kind of Alexandrian library of edible wisdom - no longer know how to feed ourselves...on the eve of the presidential election, we intend to send a strong message that food policy reform is a critical priority for the next administration, paramount in the

creation of a just and sustainable food system. The most important goal of this event is to restore the personal, visceral connection each of us has to real food, the hunger for it, the taste and the joy of it. But what really matters is what happens when we all go home. Our shared goals need to be taken up in the legislatures, the halls of Congress and the Oval Office. We know it, and they know it. It's time for a New Meal.

The notion of pleasure was the starting point for Slow Food Nation, but the message was clear from the very beginning. Here was an event that set out to change the way people think about food and food politics/policy in the United States. On the opening day of the event, Slow Food USA also launched a joint campaign with Roots of Change, a collaborative



Figure 8: Slow Food Nation information booth made from a shipping container. © Tabitha Steager

alliance of foundations and food systems experts that seeks to fundamentally transform California's food system by 2030, to gather signatures and support for the "Declaration for Healthy Food and Agriculture."¹⁰ This declaration aims to radically rebuild the United States food system, looking to reorganize it so that it is based on health – of people, ecosystems, and animals – rather than the current industrial model built on profit.

Slow Food Nation began months before the actual event opened with the transformation of the area in front of San Francisco City Hall from a treeless concrete plaza to a plaza with a large vegetable garden filling its centre. Built by Slow Food Nation volunteers and employees, the “Victory Garden” aimed to educate people about good, clean, and fair food by showing where it comes from. All food grown in the Victory Garden was donated to local food banks. By the time Slow Food Nation started the first weekend of September, the garden was in full bloom, squashes running riot out of their beds, sunflowers turning their bright yellow heads to the sun, glimpses of bright red tomatoes peeking out from between their green leaves. At the head of the Victory Garden sat the “Soap Box,” a stage constructed of recycled wood from which people could speak about important topics throughout the weekend. Speakers ranged from farmers to beekeepers, tea importers, coffee plantation workers, representatives from a coalition of farm workers for social justice, celebrity chefs, and a group of high school students who implemented an organic school garden that now supplies their cafeteria with enough produce to feed all students and teachers.

The Victory Garden was



Figure 9: Victory Garden, Slow Food Nation.
© Tabitha Steager

surrounded by a small farmers' market, each stall selling a single type of food. One stall had over twenty kinds of beans, including fresh green garbanzos. Another was piled high with baskets filled with picture-perfect strawberries. Rounds of goat cheeses topped with edible organic flowers tempted customers. The scent of ripe peaches filled the air, calling to people to come and taste and buy. The farmers and producers who actually grew or made the food manned each stall. Every booth had a placard with the origin and story of the food being sold. The prices for these products were not low generally, despite coming directly from the producers. However, prices reflected actual costs for the farmers and were set at what they needed in order to make a fair, if small, wage from their efforts. For example, a single basket



Figure 10: Heirloom tomatoes. © Tabitha Steager

of strawberries sold for \$US 4.50. For me it was a worthwhile splurge for they tasted amazing, essence of strawberry, slightly warmed from the sun.

Heirloom tomatoes, at \$US 10 per flat seemed reasonably priced given that the same amount of tomatoes from the supermarket could cost about the same price without nearly the same level of taste and pesticide-free guarantee.

Producers were happy to be there; proud that Slow Food Nation had accepted their applications to represent their products. I was interested to know whether Slow Food had made a difference in how they grew their products or in their business in general. Everyone I talked to enthusiastically supported Slow Food and its mission and voiced

appreciation for Slow Food's support of food producers. An apple farmer was particularly

eager to share her story. She was selling Gravenstein apples, a variety I grew up eating as it comes from where I was raised. At first I didn't think there was anything particularly special about Gravensteins being there at Slow Food Nation; it was a normal old apple for my family when I was a child. This farmer told me, however, that those ubiquitous apples of my childhood were almost gone. In the Sonoma County area of northern California, Gravenstein orchards once covered 9,000 acres; today there are only 700 left. Lost to urban sprawl and vineyards, the story of the Gravenstein is one being played out in areas across the United States, Canada, and Europe; housing and wine grapes bring in much more money. The farmer told me, her voice filled with enthusiasm and pride,

Before Slow Food stepped in and started supporting our efforts, people told us we were fools for growing apples instead of wine grapes. Now, because Slow Food has really made people aware of the Gravenstein, people thank us. It's a philanthropic effort. We don't make a lot of money but it's important to keep this apple alive (Pers. Com. 2008).



Figure 11: Gravenstein apples. © Tabitha Steager

For anyone who stopped to talk to the producers at the market, and from my observations a large majority of visitors did so while I sat and watched over three different days, the market provided not only fresh, delicious food but also an education. This whole market was an example of Slow Food's soft, "subversive" efforts to change people's beliefs and behaviours around food. However, in many

ways Slow Food may have been preaching to the choir. The people stopping to chat and buy perfect organic peaches and heirloom tomatoes already appreciate delicious, sustainably farmed food and are willing and able to support it financially. Just blocks away from the Victory Garden and market were hundreds of homeless people lining the streets of San Francisco's Tenderloin neighbourhood. None of them could have afforded the food on offer via Slow Food Nation, although many may have eaten shelter and food bank meals that contained produce from the Victory Garden.

Slow Food has been criticized for being elitist, especially because the food they tell people they should eat is often financially out of reach for many. While Slow Food Nation offered free events like the speeches and music played on the Soap Box, entrance to the Taste Pavilions was US\$65 per person and fees for panel discussions ranged from US\$10 to US\$25 (students could buy tickets to the talks for half price). I balked at the price for the Taste Pavilions and would not have been able to afford a ticket on my graduate

student income. However, one of my research participants kindly brought me to the VIP reception the night before the Taste Pavilions opened to the public so I was able to experience them in all their glory.



Figure 12: Part of the Fish Pavilion display. © Tabitha Steager

In retrospect, having experienced Slow Food Nation before Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre, the Taste Pavilions were Salone del Gusto taken to the Nth degree. A warehouse was transformed into a food wonderland. Rather than have halls filled with food vendors, Slow Food Nation chose to “curate” their food fantasy, selecting a small group of vendors who would display the very best examples of a short list of foodstuffs to be had in North America. The olive oil pavilion glittered with row upon row of tall thin glass bottles filled with golden oil. The honey pavilion was constructed of sheets of beeswax, glowing gold from backlighting. Fresh fish glistened on a huge bed of ice in front of translucent sheets of fabric that moved as people walked by, mimicking waves. In all, fifteen pavilions highlighted the best in beer, bread, *charcuterie*, cheese, chocolate, coffee, fish, honey and preserves, ice cream, native foods¹¹, olive oil, pickles and chutney, spirits, tea, and wine. In



Figure 13: Giant bread snail at the Slow Food Nation Bread Pavilion. © Tabitha Steager

addition, a small restaurant showcased celebrity chefs making *good, clean, and fair food* for appreciative audiences. Slow Food Nation organizers made no apologies for the Taste Pavilions; this was a place to revel in the sheer

pleasure of food and drink.

Yes, everything on offer was produced sustainably by small producers and signage told you exactly where everything came from; the only thing missing perhaps were the names of the cow who gave the milk that went into the ice creams and cheeses. However, the message here was solely about enjoyment. There was no real hard political engagement in the Taste Pavilions, except for the standard Slow Food education role. Certainly the Taste Pavilions did nothing to counter the charges of elitism within Slow Food. This was not an area where one's thoughts turned to social justice for farm workers, although in between bites of mini honey-lavender cupcakes and glasses of small-batch raspberry *eau de vie* some may have thought for a moment about the unfortunate many who were not enjoying the same bounty, but the event certainly wasn't designed to inspire that kind of thinking.

While the elitism charge levelled at Slow Food is one that I agree is difficult to contest, it is also one that needs to be explored more fully. Social movements have often been the purview of the elites in society. Consider both the women's suffrage and abolitionist movements, each of which were spear-headed by white, upper-middle class members of society; or child labour reform of the 19th century and the Civil Rights movement last century. Social justice and reform are not invalidated simply because they come from an elite sector of society whose members do not themselves experience the hardships they are fighting against. Wright and Middendorf (2008) are optimistic about the possibilities of elite activism, asking whether "the affluent classes merely [reclaim] food as a form of social capital or [whether] the efforts to redesign our food system suggest the birth of a new institutional arrangement, one that could replace the conventional productionist-centered agrifood system" (6). In addition, Andrews (2008) questions the entire debate about class when it is based on whether one shops at Extra Foods or Whole Foods "when the cheap

produce provided by mass supermarkets is guaranteed by exploitative labour in developing countries” (173). Of course, the use of exploitative labour in order to provide inexpensive products to an eager consumer population is nothing new. Western colonial power, and indeed the entire capitalist system, is built on a system of cheap labour that produces goods that can be sold to willing customers, all in order to maximize profits.¹²

By using pleasure as an entry point, Slow Food certainly attracts a socioeconomic class interested in consuming “the finer things in life.” Once within the fold, so to speak, Slow Food can really go to work on changing the cultural food behaviours and beliefs of the elite, including those beliefs around social justice and just what exactly constitutes a *good, clean, and fair* food system. However, the elite do not own food and agriculture reform. It has captured national and transnational public debate in part because reform of the food system offers something of interest to everyone. “The desire for accessible ‘quality’ food, a healthy environment, and regional economic development transcends the social markers of race, class, gender, and geography that divide us” (Wright and Middendorf 2008:5). As Johnston (2008) has remarked, “Food also represents an entry point for political engagement, making it problematic to single-handedly categorize all interest in food as bourgeois piggery” (94).

Certainly Slow Food Nation’s organizers took this entry point to heart, mixing experiences like the Taste Pavilions with a series of very politically targeted panel discussions led by alternative food systems thought-leaders like Michael Pollan, Eric Schlosser, and Marion Nestle. Perhaps more importantly, though, these panel discussions included not just people who think and write about the problems with our food system but the people who experience the social justice issues of our food system directly – farm workers.

Slow Food USA, in contrast to Slow Food in Italy, chooses to go one step further in their definition of “fair.” Fair is not only about a fair wage for farmers and producers, but a fair and good system for the people who are often hidden behind the scenes. Several of the sessions I attended featured farm workers, often speaking through interpreters, describing in detail the horrific conditions they must work under in the United States. Fields are called the “Green Hotel” or “Fields of Panties” because of the number of sexual assaults (both forced and coerced) that occur against female workers. A representative from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a community-based worker organization made up of primarily Latino, Haitian, and Mayan immigrants working in low-wage jobs throughout the state of Florida, described instances of modern-day slavery that occur on a regular basis. He told the audience that the Coalition of Immokalee Workers had recently helped to bring to justice a number of employers who have now been charged with beating workers and chaining and locking them inside trucks as punishment for not working or for trying to leave their jobs. This kind of information, focusing on serious social justice issues, was not in evidence in any way during Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre. Slow Food USA seemed to have made a particular effort to bring these voices to attendees, drawing attention not only to the environmental and taste impacts of the current industrial food system but also a stronger attention to social justice impacts of the current system. This is not to say that Slow Food International doesn’t care about these issues; conversations I had with employees and executive board members clearly showed they did and Carlo Petrini himself would agree. Andrews (2008) notes that Petrini argues that the very notion of good, clean, and fair is “profoundly political...because of the need to reject the direction of the global economy and the conflict between growth and sustainability” (57). However, it is my strong sense that Slow Food USA, not Slow Food International, is leading the charge in this direction, not just in regard to justice for workers but justice and access for the less fortunate as well. Josh Viertel, hired as Slow Food USA’s new president in 2008¹³, expressed Slow Food USA’s direction very clearly when he said recently,

For years, the sustainable-food movement in general said, ‘Food that doesn’t hurt the environment, food that doesn’t make you sick, and food that doesn’t exploit people is worth more, so you should be willing to pay more for it.’ That is okay if you can afford to pay some more for it. But for the group of people who this winter are going to have to choose between feeding their family or heating their home, that argument is a slap in the face. And when the sustainable-food movement makes that argument, corporations that sell industrial food are making the argument that ‘We’re your friend because our food costs less.’ And so our historical argument has essentially driven poor people—the people that are hurt most by the current food system—into the hands and into the cash registers of the corporations that are hurting them. That’s got to change...Our work can’t end with good food that’s clean and that’s fair that only the wealthy can afford” (McMillan 2008).

Slow Food accomplishes this work not only through flagship public events like Salone del Gusto, Terra Madre, and now Slow Food Nation but also through the local *convivia* around the world. While various *convivia* spread the Slow Food gospel, so to speak, at a local level, these large events are just one part of Slow Food’s global reach and strategy.

Chapter 8 - Virtuous Globalization

Slow Food accomplishes its goals through a unique balancing act of political and commercial activities that occur on a global scale. From its inception, Slow Food has combined business and politics. The combination of income-earning Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre is the most visible example. In addition, the organization has a very successful commercial publishing arm that focuses on travel guides for cultural tourism, food, and wine. These publications concentrate on Italy but they are published in multiple languages and marketed to a wide audience. It also has an office in Brussels from which it lobbies the European Union on agriculture and trade policy (Leitch 2003:440). Carlo Petrini announced at Terra Madre 2008 that Slow Food would have a lobbying seat at the next G8 meeting. The people I spoke with afterwards had mixed reactions. Some feared that this could mean a softening of Slow Food's more strident positions, personified in Vandana Shiva, Vice President of Slow Food and a vociferous activist against the global food system. Speaking at Terra Madre in 2006, Shiva said, "Food has become the place for fascism to function as corporations create a monopoly around seeds. It reduces us all to biodiversity serfs" (Peace 2008:35). Her speech at the opening ceremonies in 2008 was no weaker, noting that the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank "assume *everything* is a commodity, nothing has value. We will reclaim the intrinsic value of every life on Earth" (personal notes from Terra Madre 2008 Opening Ceremony). Shiva was given a standing ovation by the over 9,000 people listening in the stadium and her address to that crowd was referred to throughout Terra Madre as one of the most inspiring moments of the conference. Others heralded the opportunity to speak to the G8 as the sign that Slow Food has taken an important place on the world stage. Still another, an executive chef for a chain of high-end

hotels, welcomed Slow Food's opportunity for a larger voice while at the same time worried about those members who called for a more "radical" approach to changing the world system. It was unclear to me what exactly this person meant by "radical," only that the word itself was very off-putting.¹⁴ This same person, however, also expressed admiration for Vandana Shiva and her role in bringing a more activist voice from the developing world to Slow Food.

Furthering its global reach, in 2003 Slow Food signed an agreement with the Brazilian government to jointly develop a program to combat hunger in Brazil. Working with Brazil's Special State Minister for Food Safety, the Battle Against Hunger "asserts as a basic human right the access to healthy, safe and quality foods for all" and aims to address the chronic poverty and reliance on food imports in Brazil (Parkins and Craig 2003:25-26). This initiative is emblematic of the direction in which Slow Foods seems to be moving, emphasizing the promotion of biodiversity, small-scale agriculture, and the valorization of indigenous food knowledge, in addition to the right to pleasure outlined in their official manifesto.

Activity at a global level is integral to the success of Slow Food, and yet it seems in a way counterintuitive. Slow Food rejects the "fast life" brought by globalization and yet it has become an international organization with members in 132 countries located on almost every continent. It is difficult to see how an organization could get more global than that. Geoff Andrews (2008) notes, "that Slow Food's critique is aimed essentially in the direction of contemporary global capitalism and its varying impact on the quality of life" (17). The impacts of globalization on food are quite significant, including "the disparity between obesity and famine, environmental crisis, the impoverishment of small farmers, and

increasing global economic quality” (17). Slow Food’s criticism of globalization also extends to the growth of neo-liberal economic policies and how the concepts of free trade and market liberalization have impacted the world’s food systems. These policies, and underlying general economic and social philosophy, benefit the large agribusiness complex and undermine local knowledge and small-scale production. Slow Food rejects these aspects of globalization while at the same time embracing what it sees as its more useful aspects – global connections, networks, electronic communications – in order to more effectively accomplish its goals. As Andrews notes, Carlo Petrini calls this “virtuous” globalization or using Slow Food’s global reach to act on behalf of local food communities (152). Virtuous globalization asserts that a global system must work to aid farmers using a network of local, self-sufficient economies but that leverage the Slow Food network to build that self-sufficiency (153). For

example, the Guatemalan Huehuetenango Highlands coffee cooperative supports their members and community with revenues from the sale of their coffee, which is



Figure 14: Huehuetenango coffee for sale at Slow Food Nation. © Tabitha Steager

championed and marketed by Slow Food throughout the Slow Food global network. The Terra Madre conference is also used to build this network. Extending well beyond the conference itself, Terra Madre also includes an active online community where delegates ask questions and share advice. During Terra Madre, producers make connections with other producers that are maintained long after they leave Turin. Each local food community

involved in Slow Food is connected globally to other local food communities through this extensive network. Thus, Slow Food philosophy and support is spread at the global level and enacted and ingrained at the local level, in an alternative fashion to the accepted norm promoted through neo-liberal Capitalism. As Parkins and Craig (2007) remark,

Fundamentally, Slow Food seeks to [reconnect] economic forces [with] their social contexts and emphasize networks between, and linkages across, socio-political terrains and categories in order to promote local economies and cultures. Slow Food is only ‘anti-business’ and ‘anti-globalization’ when the primacy of market forces threaten to destroy the fabric of local communities, environments, and food cultures (125).

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of this alternative enactment of globalization. As the global economy continues its downward freefall during the writing of this thesis, it becomes ever more clear that healthy *local* economies are vastly more important than have been given credit. Integral to a healthy local, and global, economy is a sustainable, working food system. It would be a great error to assume that we currently have such a system in place in most, let alone, any areas of the world.

A Broken Food System

As I write here in 2008 British Columbia, I can buy five pound boxes of Clementines from China for under \$4.00, just in time for the holiday season. My local supermarket shelves are filled with breads, cereals, canned vegetables, frozen pizzas, milk, eggs; and, if you name it, chances are I can find it fairly easily and at a relatively affordable price. Even as a graduate student with an official “low-income,” I can afford to buy fair trade, organic, dark roasted coffee for \$15.00 per pound or the occasional croissant on a Saturday morning from a local artisan bakery for just under \$2.00; worthwhile expenditures for a bit of luxury. Meanwhile food banks across Canada put out their yearly pleas for more donations, hoping that during the Christmas season those with more will feel more generous towards those with

less. I pay my library fines at school with canned food rather than money. It works for my fellow students and me, many of whom I assume feel the requisite sense of goodness and charity the whole “Food for Fines” campaign is supposed to engender. Many of us are probably vaguely aware of the facts and figures; that there are hungry people just down the road downtown. The United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) “estimates that 854 million people suffer from undernourishment worldwide, 845 million of them in developing and transitional economies and 9 million in the industrialized world” (Wright and Middendorf 2008:5).

It is not only the hungry and undernourished we have to worry about in Canada, though. North America has experienced a number of food scares that in their most extreme have caused the deaths of numerous people, and at the very least have brought to light the cracks and dysfunctions in our established food system. Our food system is not only endangered by crises from overseas – think of milk products from China purposely laced with melamine to enhance profit making. Foods produced right here at home are also subject to serious safety issues. Listeria infected processed meat plants in Canada, resulting in the sale of infected lunchmeat across Canada. Fifteen people have died from listeriosis to date as a result (CFIA 2008). Earlier in the year both tomatoes and spinach were removed from store shelves and restaurant menus as news broke of salmonella and E. coli contamination, respectively. Speaking at a panel held during Slow Food Nation in San Francisco, Eric Schlosser remarked on what he called the “death shadow” of our food system. As he defined it, the death shadow is when, in the face of horrifying statistics – such as the death of ten farm workers from exposure to heat and lack of water in California alone as of September 2008 – society chooses to ignore the problems of the food system because it does not want to

accept the human costs. We forget or ignore this kind of news because it challenges our humanity. The food system, generally, works for those of us with access to it. What we fail to realize and accept, though, is that an unequal food system is *not* a working food system. A working food system is accessible to all levels of society, it is environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable, and it provides culturally appropriate food to its consumers. I have talked about some of the ways Slow Food supports producers, or the “fair” component of the *good, clean, and fair* equation. Good and clean, though, are equally necessary and Slow Food addresses these two attributes in several ways.

Chapter 9 – Good, Clean, and Fair: Eco-Gastronomy and Environmental Sustainability

In the past five years, Slow Food has increasingly worked to address the issues of an environmentally friendly food system. Each initiative works, like most things in the Slow Food organization, through fostering local and direct economic connections. Through the Ark of Taste, Slow Food seeks to protect endangered food products, from wild Miner's Lettuce in Canada to Tibetan yak's milk cheese, to Guatemalan Huehuetenango Highlands coffee. Combined with this protection comes commercial promotion in the form of official *Presidia* products. Latin for a garrison fortress, presidium "signifies the action of safeguarding and protecting" (Petrini 2001:93). Presidia products are judged on strict criteria, nominated through an Ark of Taste board in their country of origin, and reviewed by the international Ark of Taste commission. Presidia products must be in danger of disappearing, have strong historical connections to a particular geographic region and a particular local identity, and taste good, of course. Because Presidia are expected to grow a commercial market, good taste is of premium importance; if it tastes bad no one will buy it.¹⁵

As I became more immersed in Slow Food through my research, my role necessarily became less that of observer and more that of participant. As I mentioned earlier, in order to understand Slow Food, I had to go to where the real work was happening and that happens to be with volunteers. Following this line of thinking, I became a volunteer myself and took on the role of overseeing the Canadian Ark of Taste, which includes any Presidia products Canada might have. Thus, I know intimately how the Ark of Taste and Presidia projects work, not only from research but also from volunteering my time ("participating") on the projects. During my tenure, Canada has added three wild foods to the International Slow

Food Ark of Taste, bringing us to ten total products.¹⁶ In contrast, the United States has well over 100 products on their Ark, but they also have a much larger and active membership.

Canada currently has one Presidium, Red Fife wheat, with a story that sounds almost mythical. By the 1860s Red Fife was grown across Canada, adapting well to Canada's diverse growing conditions. It set Canadian wheat standards until the early 1900s when it was



Figure 15: The Red Fife wheat booth at Salone del Gusto. © Tabitha Steager

replaced by other varieties. Bakers have told me that Red Fife does not do well with commercial yeasts, so as bread production moved from smaller bakeries using sourdough starter to larger facilities that used commercial yeast, Red Fife was no longer a suitable flour and fell out of favour. In addition, it is not a high-producing wheat variety and was prone to rust, thus adding to its decline. Fifteen years ago Red Fife wheat was practically extinct; several one-kilo bags sat in an Agriculture Canada seed bank but it wasn't being grown in Canada in any significant amounts. In the late 1980s Sharon Rempel, Chief Interpreter of The Grist Mill historic site in Keremeos, British Columbia, started the Heritage Wheat Project and planted a small amount of the one-pound bag she had secured from Agriculture Canada.

From there the rest is history, as they say. Interest in growing heritage wheats rose in Canada throughout the 1990s and as part of this resurgence in old wheats, Red Fife production increased. Five years ago the Slow Food Vancouver Island convivium leaders nominated Red Fife to the Ark of Taste and worked to create the Red Fife Presidium. While the survival and resurgence of Red Fife wheat is clearly not due solely to Slow Food support, that support nevertheless helped significantly to increase Red Fife demand and interest. Last year over 500 tonnes were harvested and Red Fife wheat is considered a true Presidia success story. Although a small amount is sold at the retail level, mostly through small bakeries, commercial bakers who bake artisanal-style bread using natural leavening use the majority of the crop.

The Ark of Taste and Presidia are the two major projects of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity. The Foundation is integral to Slow Food's work as a biodiversity champion and to the recognition of the organization by environmental activists and NGOs as a genuine player in the environmental arena. Vandana Shiva initially became involved with Slow Food via a collaborative project of Slow Food and representatives of environmental organizations, the Commission on the Future of Food, which produced a manifesto on food sovereignty that was presented to the World Trade Organization. The creation of the Foundation as Slow Food's biodiversity and environmental arm and the subsequent collaborative work it did with other environmental organizations was essential to Slow Food's future strategy. Carlo Petrini's argument to sceptical environmentalists and anti-hunger activists was that the ecological aspects of industrial agriculture and world economic inequality were tightly integrated with food *culture*. Cultural food knowledge is part of cultural diversity and future economic success depends on the biodiversity of land and crops.

Gastronomic pleasure is prevalent in all cultural traditions and that fact is not negated simply because poverty and hunger exist in the world (Andrews 2008:158). Convincing other activists of this “re-positioned the ‘politics of pleasure’ within a global framework, no longer reduced to the taste buds of Western European gastronomes but extended to the plight of third world producers” (159).

This repositioning allowed for the creation of a new Slow Food concept, ‘eco-gastronomy,’ where agricultural, economic, scientific, technical, social, and cultural processes are all considered. Eco-gastronomy assumes that food “must be grown and produced in a sustainable way; biodiversity and local traditions of cuisine and production must be preserved even if it costs more” (Petrini 2007:9). As Carlo Petrini writes in *Slow Food Nation* (2007),

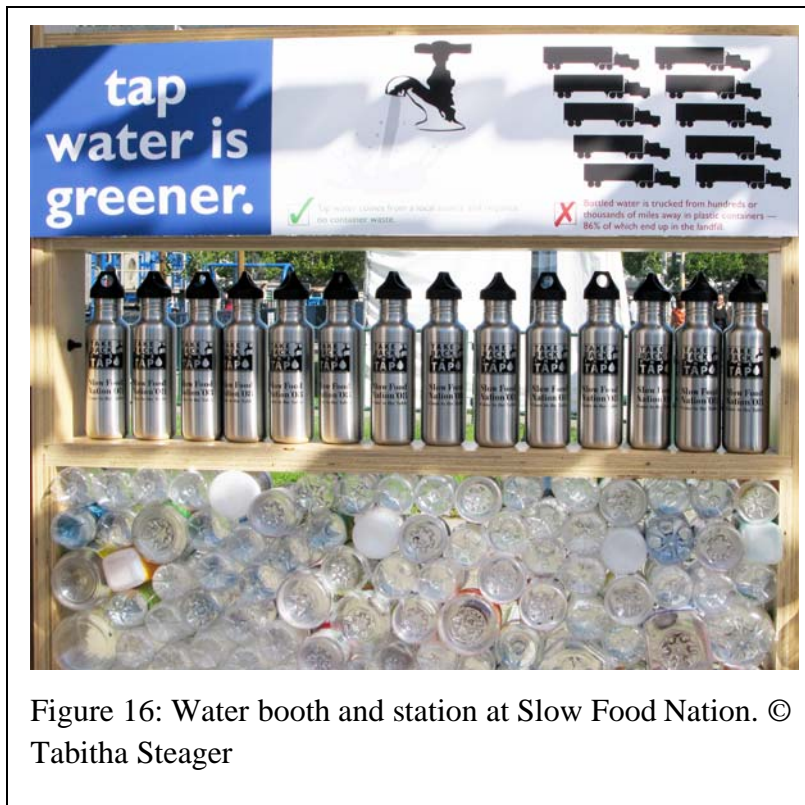
Food and its production must regain the central place that they deserve among human activities, and we must reexamine the criteria that guide our actions.... The aim is to make a significant improvement to everybody’s quality of life without having to submit, as we have done until now, to a model of development that is incompatible with the needs of the planet (23).

This newer approach is certainly in keeping with global consumer demands in developed countries. As Bonnano and Constance have noted, “consumption that emphasizes quality, naturalness, tradition, locality, and environmental stewardship has reached unprecedented proportions” (2008:39). In my local Superstore, there are signs posted at the entrance alerting customers that they “buy local” and highlighting their efforts to be “green.” Customers can purchase reusable shopping bags, Earth-friendly cleaning products, and a line of “green” toilet paper and paper towels and plastic garbage bags made from recycled materials. The Canadian chain has also been running a series of television commercials about their organic product lines, complete with gurgling babies and a generically handsome CEO

making the pitch. The “new social movement-based demands for environmentally sound, high-quality, healthier food items have affected the production, distribution, and social sites of consumption” (40) and retailers are responding in droves to meet the demand.

Challenges to Sustainability

Despite its work to combine gastronomic pleasure with a vision of sustainable, biologically diverse agricultural system, Slow Food also faces internal contradictions. During its 2007 International Congress meeting in Puebla, Mexico, Carlo Petrini strongly reinforced the concept of the “right to travel” as being a foundational concept of the movement. Through travel, producers and co-producers (Slow Food’s way of referring to consumers to indicate the role consumers also have in the production process) are exposed to cultural diversity and learn the value of multiple ways of seeing and understanding the world. A valuable opportunity, to be sure, but by championing travel, Slow Food at the same time undermines its claim to environmental responsibility. The environmental costs of travel, especially air travel, are becoming increasingly apparent and yet Slow Food members regularly travel around the world to various meetings and events. There is also little, if any, discussion in Slow Food literature or meetings about the environmental impact of transporting specialty foodstuffs globally for eager consumers. As Janet Chrzan has noted, “the more ecologically-minded elements of Slow Food may find themselves at odds with convivia activities that seem to emphasize pleasure over ecosystem preservation” (2005:121). Despite these criticisms, however, Slow Food does strongly advocate the importance of supporting small-scale, indigenous agriculture. This type of agriculture requires far fewer chemical fertilizers, less water, and has a smaller environmental “footprint” than large-scale



industrial agriculture, and at the very least to providing subsistence, a comfortable living to millions of small farmers around the world.

In addition to travel, the scale of Slow Food’s large flagship events is such that their environmental footprint cannot be small. Not only

do tens of thousands of people travel by air and car to get to these events, the amount of garbage they generate must be astronomical. Slow Food USA attempted to address these concerns by making Slow Food Nation as green as possible. All the stalls at the marketplace were constructed using recycled wood and other recycled or recyclable materials.

Composting and recycling bins were readily available and easy to understand what was to be placed where. All plates, cups, and utensils used by vendors were compostable. Even the very “buildings” where Slow Food Nation ticket and information offices were located were made from something that used to have a different use – in this case shipping containers were converted to portable “rooms” with roof gardens. There were very few printed materials available, and those that were produced and distributed by Slow Food Nation were on recycled paper printed with soy-based inks. Perhaps the most significant nod to

environmental responsibility was the ban on bottled water. That there would be no bottled water available at the event was publicized well in advance. People were urged to bring their own water bottles and fill them at water stations available throughout the event. A stand at the marketplace, constructed of empty plastic water bottles, sold Slow Food Nation-branded stainless steel water bottles to attendees while volunteers educated people about the environmental and health hazards posed by the uncountable numbers of plastic bottles that human beings use every day. In contrast, one of Salone



Figure 17: Recycling and waste bins at Salone del Gusto. © Tabitha Steager

del Gusto's two primary sponsors was Lurisia water, which provided mountains of bottled water to exhibitors and attendees at Salone and Terra Madre. At the Red Fife booth alone we went through a 12-bottle case of water in plastic bottles daily as there was no where to refill a reusable bottle even if you had brought your own. There were no reusable water bottles for sale anywhere. This is not solely due to a lack of concern on Slow Food's part. I think in large part it is actually culturally based. Italy has the highest consumption of bottled water per capita in the world (Larsen 2007). It simply does not occur to them to drink water from the tap; in some cases for good reason as the water in areas like Campania is polluted.

Salone and Terra Madre were billed, like Slow Food Nation, as “green” events but the attempts, at least from a northern California perspective where recycling and composting is almost a religion for some, fell very short. Slow Food produces vast quantities of printed materials every year and they were in evidence all over Salone and Terra Madre. Each delegate received a fabric bag filled with printed materials, every Presidia booth had flyers describing the products, at least two enormous Slow Food booths provided brochures, newsletters, flyers, magazines and more for 180,000 attendees. The sheer quantities of paper available were awe inspiring, if disturbing for an event being billed as green. To be fair, composting and recycling bins were available, but except for one location with a very vocal volunteer ordering people to put their items in the correct bin, use of the bins seemed to be intermittent and there was not much effort made to make sure compostables went into the compost bin, plastics in the plastics bin, etc. Both the Red Fife booth and the cheese booth next to us made use of large compost bins but we constantly had to pull garbage out of them as people just randomly threw whatever they felt like into the containers. I am unclear whether this is again a cultural difference; perhaps Italians do not recycle on a regular basis so it isn’t a learned behaviour. Also, if Slow Food Nation had been held somewhere other than San Francisco where, as I said, recycling is akin to religion, I may have witnessed the same sort of behaviour as I did during Salone/Terra Madre.

Chapter 10 – Changing Culture One Bite at a Time

In addition to conferences, an important part of Slow Food’s strategy is “taste education.” This is accomplished at large events like Salone, Terra Madre, and Slow Food Nation but Slow Food’s educational program extends much further than those events. Slow Food’s strategy begins, most importantly, with children. Slow Food believes, and many other chefs and food professionals agree, that if you can capture children’s taste buds early on you have them for life. This is key if Slow Food hopes to change cultural behaviours around food since it is much easier to start with a young child and enculturate them from the start rather than trying to change adults who are understandably much more difficult to reach. Early education includes sensory education – learning what real food, versus processed food, smells, feels, and tastes like. Tasting a tree-ripened peach next to a hard grocery store peach can be a revelation. As adults we recognize what we’ve been missing if we’ve never had a tree-ripened peach before. Children are more likely to learn that a tree-ripened peach is the way it is supposed to be if that is what they first eat. The abnormal peach then becomes the hard, tasteless one sold in most grocery stores. Consider an inner-city child from a low-income family. Their exposure to fresh produce, picked at its peak, could be



Figure 18: Salone del Gusto children’s taste education room. © Tabitha Steager

expected to be little to none. Many Slow Food convivia around the world sponsor projects that bring garden-fresh foods directly to the classroom, gaining access to children's taste buds at an age when their sensory taste perceptions and understandings about what makes food *good* are being formed. In addition to tasting foods, students learn how they are grown and raised, often first hand. Many Italian elementary schools now include school gardens where students plant, care for, harvest, and finally eat a variety of foods. Similar programs exist in the United States and Canada, both Slow Food supported and not. The Nova Scotia Slow Food convivium sponsors a school garden project that has been so successful that they are working with other school districts in other areas of Canada to implement similar programs. This kind of taste education is a sort of cultural food indoctrination that aims to gain converts before they need to be converted. Raising a generation of children who have internalized notions of *good, clean, and fair* food could produce inherent changes in cultural beliefs and behaviours around food – a vital component in changing the world's food system.

Slow Food does not stop with elementary education. In 2004 it launched the University of Gastronomic Sciences with the support, including funding, of the Italian government. Students study courses on food history, the anthropology of food, gastronomic tourism, the sociology of consumption, among others. The goal of the University of Gastronomic Sciences was to recognize gastronomy as a distinctive discipline. Graduates are expected to be experts in food production, the sensory qualities of food and wine, and understand how to guide the market towards the production of good, clean, and fair food. In addition to classroom work, students do extensive hands-on learning during a series of *stages*. A stage might include a weeklong stay at a rare-breed pig farm where the student learns all about ethical animal husbandry as well as the unique taste characteristics of said

rare breed of pig. I spoke with several graduates who spent several weeks in Greece taking a food tour of the country, learning about Greek food culture, honey and cheese production, the merits of Greek olive oil versus Italian olive oil ¹⁷, and more. I was a guest at a wine and cheese party with the same graduates, who were immediately identifiable as University of Gastronomic Sciences students due to the way they ate the cheese. It involved a complex ritual of carefully breaking each piece of cheese in half, then observing the texture of the cheese at the breaking point. Then each of them sniffed the cheese several times, finally placing a small piece in their mouth and chewing slowly. Several were pronounced a month, perhaps five weeks, past their prime. If it sounds a bit comical, it was, but it illustrated to me not only how seriously the graduates took the lessons they learned, but also the extent to which their senses around food had been trained and heightened. Taste is not a minor matter to Slow Food, either in their philosophy or in their politics. As Andrews (2008) observes, “Taste becomes political in Slow Food’s argument because of the effect standardisation has had on the palates of ordinary people” (171). The ability to educate someone’s palate, especially at a young age as Slow Food does through elementary education, is pivotal in Slow Food’s attempts to change food behaviours and beliefs around the world.

Chapter 11 – Building a Global Community

As I waited at the luggage carousel in Milan after an overnight flight from British Columbia, I watched my fellow travelers and tried to distinguish other Terra Madre delegates. A woman next to me struck up a conversation with me upon seeing the Slow Food logo patch I have on my backpack. She was from a convivium in Vermont, coming to



Figure 19: Terra Madre marketplace. © Tabitha Steager

experience Salone and Terra Madre, but as an observer only. We shared a few sleepy sentences about whether either of us had been before and what we expected. Then my bag arrived and I moved out the door into the crowd. A woman in a bright goldenrod sportsjacket stood at a small podium, a sign above her indicating Terra Madre delegates were to check in with her. I lined up to give her my name and recognized the Mali Ark of Taste representative. We nodded hello and he greeted me in French. Miraculously, despite my jet lag and my mental preparation to hear and speak Italian, I answered politely back in French. The people in line in front of me looked thoroughly confused as the woman in the jacket explained in slow, accented English

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to go down the hall to door number seven, look for another woman in another yellow jacket who would guide us all to the bus for Turin. As they walked away they discussed something in Portuguese. I made my way to where we were to catch the bus and looked for familiar faces. There was one of the members of the executive council from Ireland. She smiled, recognizing me but clearly unsure of where exactly she had seen me before. When the bus finally arrived, I was one of the first on. I watched with interest as short, stocky women wearing traditional embroidered Guatemalan dress joined me. Then I saw the man from Mali along with four other women and an older man. Each had luggage carts filled with suitcases and the kind of fabric/plastic bags you see in airports in the Third World or amongst arriving immigrants to the United States and Canada. Filled to bursting, each bag looked like it held enough for five months, not five days. I was thoroughly confused, but I wasn't to get an answer to why they had brought so much luggage until two days later when Terra Madre officially began. Walking through Terra Madre's central area, I was amazed to see a huge market set up on tables and mats on the concrete floor. Men and women in colourful dress hawked indigo-dyed textiles and beaded bracelets from Kenya, dried chiles from Mexico, woven silk rugs from Uzbekistan, painted papers from Thailand, even yak's milk and cheese from Tibet, although to this day I have no idea how they got it through customs. Now all of those bags made sense. They weren't filled with clothes but with goods to sell to other Terra Madre delegates. I asked a Slow Food employee how they had arranged the market and was told that it sprang up without Slow Food's approval during the first Terra Madre. In 2008, the third instalment of the conference, it had grown even larger and was officially "ignored" by Slow Food officials. Whether officially sanctioned or not, if the floor space taken up by the market had been left empty, there would have been a vast unused area right in the middle of

the convention floor. Although most vendors were not selling food, this “impromptu” market served as a daily visual reminder of the international reach of Slow Food and the vast distances people had traveled to come to this meeting of world food communities.

I’ve already discussed the political importance of Terra Madre in detail. What I have not explored is the importance that Terra Madre, and to a lesser extent Salone del Gusto, play in building Slow Food’s global community. Considering that Slow Food has 85,000 members in over 100 countries, maintaining a sense of connection and community between them all seems almost impossible. After attending the International Congress in Puebla, Slow Food

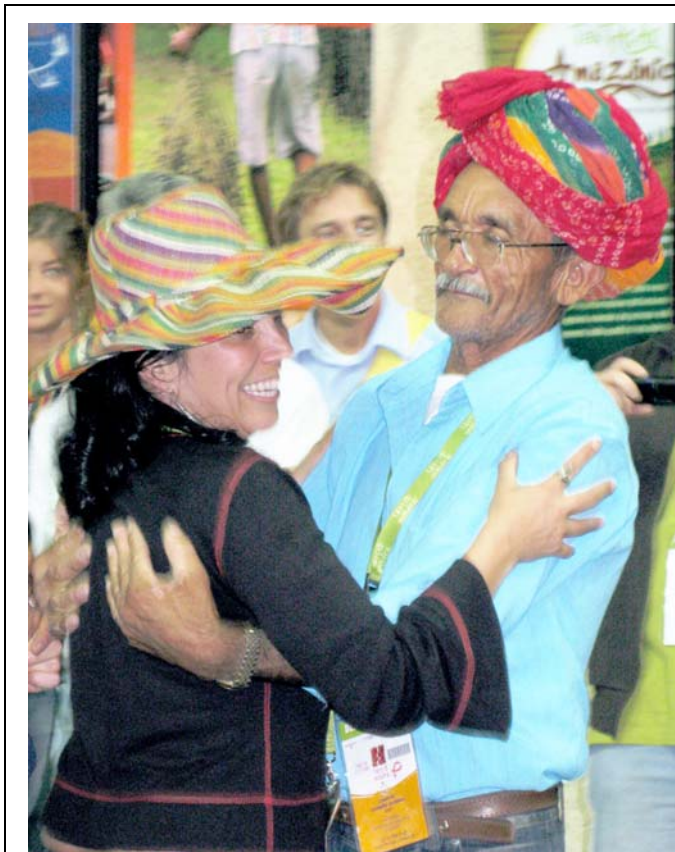


Figure 20: Terra Madre delegates dancing in the hall. © Tabitha Steager

Nation, and finally Terra Madre and Salone del Gusto, it became clear to me that one of the most important connecting threads is these conferences. As Hannerz (2003b) has observed about studies of transnational organizations, “Conferences show up as important occasions in one study after the other. Actually, it is often precisely these kinds of temporary meeting places, where participants are only briefly present together, which contribute critically to the

formation and enduring cohesion of translocal networks” (27-28). This is most definitely the

case with Slow Food. Terra Madre and Salone del Gusto happen every two years and many attendees have come several times. The conferences are occasions to renew friendships made during the last conference. Memories and updates are shared. Favourite food vendors are visited. Recurring themes are explored during major events such as opening and closing ceremonies. Attendance at these conferences reinforces a sense of community amongst Slow Food members despite being separated by vast distances. I know that I share some common understanding with every person there, even if they are from a small village in Ghana and I live in a mid-sized city in western Canada, because they are Slow Food members too. Veterans of past events guide newcomers and explain the ropes. Navigating an event like Terra Madre, from where to get coffee to how to juggle all the different discussions, can be daunting. Having someone who knows the ropes helps immensely and forms an immediate bond between each party.

During Terra Madre 2006, Adrian Peace (2008) noted that, “It was immediately evident that many present were emotionally and deeply immersed in this collective happening, which gave real substance to the claims of global interconnectedness” (33). I had the same impression two years later and will share one particularly evocative example. In 2008, Terra Madre shared space in the Lingotto Oval with the Presidia exhibitors. Divided by a wall, both were still in the same building and thus many Terra Madre delegates spent a lot of time visiting Presidia booths and talking to vendors. In fact, many of the Presidia vendors were also Terra Madre delegates, so there was a lot of overlap. During a break from my Red Fife booth duty, I accompanied another Canadian delegate to a stand serving an especially delicious food he had tasted earlier and was excited to share with two of us. We made our way through the crowds to the stand where we tasted a blend of onions, celery, and carrots

finely chopped with pork lard, then slowly cooked with tomato sauce, all spread onto bread made with Red Fife wheat flour we'd brought with us specifically for that purpose. The booth right next to this was a group of cheese makers from Friuli, in northeastern Italy. A stocky, solid-looking man beckoned my friend and I forward, into the booth, where he asked us in Italian if we wanted to watch a video about his cheese. We said yes and he proceeded to pull out a portable DVD player and showed us a video of him and his wife making cheese, pointing out their home in the background and providing a running commentary for the ten minutes or so the video ran. Afterwards, he asked us where we were from. We answered Canada and he smiled, smacked his balding head and replied in Italian, "*Ma* [but], I have a cousin who lives in Canada!! I think...Edmonton...No. Calgary. Yes, Calgary." "But I was born in Calgary," my friend exclaimed in return. The cheese maker's face fell and tears filled his eyes. "This place," and he swept his arms to indicate Terra Madre, "this place and this world are so small!" He continued to cry and had to walk away to the corner of the booth to compose himself. A simple enough story but it exemplifies for me the kinds of emotions and connections that people make during Terra Madre.

The connections made at Terra Madre do not stop once everyone goes home. Communication between Terra Madre participants continues through a website, blog, and discussion forum. Links made between producers have so far spawned several co-operative ventures, new distribution systems, and work exchanges. The Terra Madre participants I've spoken with overwhelmingly approve of the event and find it a valuable resource for small-scale food producers; many describe it as a life-changing event.

Terra Madre is not without its issues, however. Foremost in my mind is the fraught



Figure 21: Terra Madre delegates. © Tabitha Steager

notion of the exotic Other. As Peace (2008) remarked, “[Terra Madre] is also the occasion on which the myths and fetishisms of Slow Food are much in evidence” (31); specifically, the myth of the virtuous small-scale producer, in all their exotic glory. I could never get any of the Slow Food employees I spoke with to admit to me that delegates were specifically asked to come dressed in traditional clothing but that was certainly the impression that I and other delegates had. This may be a Terra Madre tradition that has taken hold over

the past two instalments of the conference; exactly how it happens is unclear. Nevertheless, men and women straight out of National Geographic photos wander the halls of Terra Madre and Salone, much to the delight of the non-Exotic, mostly Western European attendees. There were also a number of European producers wearing traditional dress, but their numbers were much smaller than those from developing regions. Slow Food has been criticized for their lack of awareness of their seeming propensity to fetishize producers, particularly those from developing areas of the world. Donati (2005) notes that,

Cultural otherness is transformed into a source of fetishized pleasure without critically examining or challenging the complicity of Western culture in the

racial marginalization or cultural appropriation of difference...Slow Food unwittingly reinforces an imperialist dichotomization of the Western self and its 'other' – civilized and underdeveloped, powerful and powerless, generous benefactor and unfortunate beneficiary (231, 233).



Figure 22: European cheese makers. © Tabitha Steager

Perhaps Slow Food has taken these types of criticisms to heart and is working to address them. Speaking of Terra Madre 2006, Peace (2008) describes, “Enormous images of those in strikingly authentic ‘traditional’ apparel were projected above the stage, along with *Millennium*-type still photographs of



Figure 23: Banner at the International Congress in Puebla. © Tabitha Steager

numerous exotic Others” (33). These were no longer in evidence in 2008, although the same images had been used during the International Congress in Puebla in November 2007.

Despite this change I wonder whether Slow Food has truly taken these criticisms to heart. As I mentioned before, Terra Madre shared space in the same building with the Presidia exhibitors. Dividing the two areas was a wall approximately six feet high, except for a single section where an open area looked out from the Presidia area into the Terra Madre marketplace, or vice versa. This open section had curtains that were always kept open but people were prevented from passing through the gap by barred metal barriers and a large security guard. While I was never fast enough with my camera to get a photo, I witnessed Salone del Gusto attendees standing at the metal barrier looking in at those of us on the Terra Madre side like so many animals in a zoo. This may be a completely unfair interpretation of events but it was my response at the time, as well as that of several delegates with whom I spoke.

However, ascribing the appearance of those in native dress solely to

pressure from Slow Food would be to make a grievous error. Terra Madre delegates are individuals who exercise their own choices, their own agency, in multiple ways. Those delegates who choose to wear traditional dress do just that, they *choose* to do so whether



Figure 24: Barrier between Terra Madre delegate area and public area. © Tabitha Steager

through cultural pride or because they feel they might sell more jewellery or carved statues at the market because they look more “authentic.” As I discussed in Chapter 2, agency, nor fetishization, is unfettered. As individuals express agency, they do not do it in a vacuum. One could interpret the appearance of Terra Madre delegates in native dress in multiple ways – as a repetition of colonial patterns and the use of the Other for the benefit of the dominant power or as an expression of personal pride and the power inherent in holding on to unique cultural markers in the face of Western colonial domination. The truth is, it is both and more. The intersections of agency and fetishization, exotic Other and Western Colonial domination are too extensive to address here, but it is enough in evidence within Slow Food International’s events and publications that I felt it important to call attention to it.

It is interesting to note that while there was a Taste Pavilion at Slow Food Nation dedicated to Native Foods, there were no corresponding “natives” in “native” dress on hand. There were Native American producers who spoke about their traditional foodways and production methods but they were not obviously Other in appearance. Indeed, had anything like what I observed in Turin been in evidence in San Francisco, Slow Food USA would have most likely been roundly dismissed, let alone excoriated, as an elitist, out of touch, culturally insensitive organization that used indigenous people for its own gain. I do not mean to imply that this is in any way what Slow Food International does but I do think that there continues to be a need for an acknowledgement and further critical exploration of how Slow Food may help to perpetuate such problematic Western imperialist notions of self and Other.

Chapter 12 – Expanding the Network: Slow Food Philosophy and Città Slow



Figure 25: Ludlow, England. The first Città Slow in the UK. © Tabitha Steager

The idea of living life guided by a ‘slow’ philosophy is one that has spread in recent years. Some see it as a global social movement (see Honoré 2004), others as a set of guiding principles that can be used in a variety of ways. *Città Slow*, Italian for ‘slow city’, founded in Italy in 1999, is a direct offshoot of the Slow Food movement. Central to Città Slow’s agenda, like that of Slow Food, is the promotion of sustainability and positive human interaction. Città Slow

takes that agenda further, though, and applies it to entire cities, envisioning urban planning based on ‘slow’ principles. In opposition to large, urban areas filled with multi-national chain stores, crime and negatively perceived social change, Città Slow certifies towns and small cities with populations of no more than 50,000, based on a defined set of criteria in the Città Slow Charter. These include the implementation of environmental policies that focus on recycling and reuse; infrastructure that supports environmentally friendly use of land; and the

protection and promotion of products with “roots in tradition” (Città Slow Italy 2007). Towns hoping to be certified must meet a minimum list of criteria before the Città Slow international network will consider their membership. Once admitted, member towns agree to work towards a set of goals that aim to improve quality of life through such loosely defined goals as protecting the environment, promoting local goods and produce, and by “avoiding the ‘sameness’ that afflicts too many towns in the modern world” (Città Slow UK 2008).

Like Slow Food, Città Slow is a reaction to the discomfort people feel when confronted with global forces that seem to be changing the very fabric of their lives. Città Slow seeks to create places that, if not completely free of global impacts, are at least independent of them and able to make choices about the future of a community at a local level. According to Paul Knox (2005), with globalization we are faced with places that are changing rapidly and the more they change the more they look alike and seem “less able to retain a distinctive sense of place, ... the less they are able to sustain public social life” (3). As commonalities increase, distinctiveness becomes a valuable commodity, so we see a trend towards places, especially small, charming towns, being “reimagined, designed, packaged, themed and marketed...The question of who does the reimagining and cultural packaging, and on whose terms, can become an important issue for the quality of local life” (4). Città Slow is an alternative to large-scale development and a way that small localities see to preserve their independence and a way of life they envision. Ideologically, the Città Slow agenda assumes that a ‘better’ and more enjoyable urban life can be achieved through the implementation of the urban design and social criteria as outlined by Città Slow. Whether that is true remains to be seen. While the movement has grown to over 100 cities in 10

countries, there is little literature on the successes (or failures) of Città Slow initiatives.

Based on my observations while living in Ludlow, the first Città Slow in the United Kingdom, for six weeks in 2007, the goals and ideals are good ones, popular on the surface with many residents, but implementing them is a challenging task. Time, and additional research, will tell whether this offshoot of Slow Food will be as successful as its parent movement.

Chapter 13 – The Future Beckons

From the foothills of northern Italy and the passionate hearts of a group of young Italians to a transnational social movement with a president named a “European Hero” by *Time* magazine in 2004, Slow Food has come a long way. Critics of the movement brand it elitist and out of touch with reality, unconcerned with the plight of the world’s hungry (see Chrzan 2005; Labelle 2001; Laudan 2004), while it touts the pleasure that can be found in esoteric food products only the wealthy can afford. While perhaps some of these charges were true at one time, and may be true within particular local branches of the movement, they ignore the real strides Slow Food has made in its barely twenty year history to fully articulate its original, rights-of-the-everyman philosophical underpinnings. In order to fully, and fairly, analyze Slow Food, we need to consider the role it plays in the larger global context. As Parkins and Craig have noted, we need to examine “the forms of global exchange and communication that a movement like Slow Food seeks to mobilize...play an effective part in ongoing public debates about globalization and the power of transnational corporations; how, in short, [is Slow Food] a participant in an emerging transnational civil society” (Parkins and Craig 2003:34). Slow Food, true to its Communist/Leftist roots, asks us to question and contest the norms by which we live our lives. It asks us to question not only the environmental sustainability of our current food system but also the social and humanitarian impacts of that system. With its move in recent years to ‘eco-gastronomy,’ Slow Food asks us to move beyond a mere attentiveness to what is on our plate to “locate food in a global context of risk and its networks of relations – to cultures, places and ecosystems – which require an ethical response” (124). Earlier this year news in Canada was filled with stories of global food shortages and the dangers posed to food security, not just in the developing world

but also across the globe. Panicked shoppers in North America stockpiled rice over the media-generated fears that prices would skyrocket. While there have been significant global food price increases before – from 1972-1975 grain shortages in the Soviet Union triggered an 80% increase in global food prices – the perfect storm of climate change, peak oil, bio-fuel production, and increasing demand by a growing middle class around the world does not look like a mere blip on the radar. If we as a human race are to weather this storm and survive, we must look at new ways of doing things given that the current system so clearly no longer works. The Slow Food movement offers one piece of the solution when it demands that all food, for all people should be *good, clean, and fair*. To deliver on that promise, our global systems must undergo drastic changes. Those changes, though, must happen at a local level in order to have a chance of succeeding. It is anybody's guess whether Slow Food can continue to build on its promise and help to forge a new future for food in the world, but certainly the dreams and goals formed by those young Italians over twenty years ago are still just as relevant today. Yet, the world has changed dramatically. The social and economic forces in play today – multinational corporations, climate change, large-scale human diasporas that challenge notions of just who exactly is local and who then has rights to resources, an even greater gap between the haves and the have nots – must be examined and understood if we are to understand where Slow Food is today and where it may be in the future. Unfortunately, I think that this is the best I can do as a researcher, to try and understand the contextual importance of things and just how actors seem to think they fit within those contexts. I do not think that there is a neat, ready-made theoretical slot that I can fit this all into. This is perhaps anathema to many within the social sciences, but as I follow in the steps of theoretical guides like Geertz and Ortner, I still think it is the best approach.

As I write, I hope that the members of Slow Food are able to make a difference and help to institute changes that will bring a future of new possibilities rather than bleak vistas. The movement gains in strength as it spreads globally, its members protesting *for* a new food future rather than *against* systems they dislike, in the spirit of Slow Food's charismatic and evangelical founder.

Some may question why the work of Slow Food and that of others attempting to change the food system is so important. For me it is about nothing less than the world's future, the future for all of our children, our planet's future; our food system is directly linked to the environmental and economic challenges we face today. Slow Food's attempt to address these challenges is an important one. As Johnston (2008) notes,

If counterhegemonic food practices are to reclaim the commons, they must restrict commodification, limit the separation of food production and consumption, access life-goods through cooperation and communal approaches, and rethink the categories of 'needs' and 'wants.' This means building accessible connections between farm folk and city folk and creating spheres where people question their food preferences and even learn to feed themselves – either through their own labor or through the labor of people with whom they share bonds of citizenship obligations and responsibilities (101).

Slow Food has evolved from an organization that talked about the human right to pleasure to one that addresses a much more intrinsic human right; good, clean, and fair food is a right, not a privilege. Human beings should have access to nutritious food that tastes good to them, whatever their definition of good taste may be. No child should have to go hungry. The rich biodiversity of our planet should be protected and preserved for future generations. As I write this conclusion, news has just been released confirming the contamination of Mexico's indigenous corn varieties with GMO corn varieties (Stolz 2008). Once an indigenous species disappears, it is gone forever. There are still so many unknowns regarding the impact of significant losses of biodiversity that every loss is a tragedy. How those losses will impact

the future of ecosystems is unknown. The current threat the global industrial agricultural system poses to global biodiversity, food security, and climate change is a very real one; asserting the right to pleasure is no longer enough. If the Slow Food movement is to change the world, as Carlo Petrini and his friends hoped when they were earnest young men, it must address food through multiple avenues. This can seem like an uphill battle indeed. The more pessimistic might think that is an impossible task. As Johnston (2008) has noted, “while activists busy themselves with food drives, heirloom tomatoes, and garden plots, the state surreptitiously diminishes its responsibility for basic needs like food and shelter...

Community gardens and school lunches can be life-affirming and hopeful, but for some critics they are comparable to rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*” (97). While remaking the global food system, one locality at a time, is certainly a Herculean task I have to hope that it is indeed possible. As Slow Food USA injects a stronger political focus into the movement and works to change things in the United States, one of the largest and most influential food systems on the globe, I have hope. As the movement actively recruits and educates more and more children and young people, I have even more hope, for if we can change the cultural behaviours and beliefs of the younger generation so that they not only demand a more just and sustainable food system for all but also implement it as the next generation of leaders then, to end on a trite but optimistic note, there really is hope for us all.

Notes

¹ A particularly memorable meal included a lunchtime appetizer in Puebla, Mexico of gelled avocado purée topped with large fried grasshoppers. I think this is quite possibly the worst thing I have eaten in my life to date, and I've eaten a lot of things that most North Americans would consider strange or off-putting. The grasshoppers were the more edible part of the dish. A more appetizing meal, and more of what many imagine one eating, I think, when researching Slow Food, entailed four courses of stuffed pasta dishes (from wild hare ravioli with tomato sauce to delicate nettle and fresh ricotta-stuffed tortolloni to ravioli stuffed with salty speck sausage and coated in saffron cream sauce) in a restaurant run by three sisters. Their cozy restaurant is tucked into a hillside in Castelvetro, a mountain village in Emilia-Romagna. I found myself there not to see the castle but simply because a Slow Food member wanted to bring a group of us to share in her discovery of this amazing little restaurant.

² Convivium (plural *convivia*), from the Latin for feast and celebration. Despite suggestions from English-speaking countries that another, more commonly understood word be used to designate local membership chapters, the Italian-based Slow Food International office decided against this change. Strangely enough, local chapters in Italy are not called *convivia* but *condotte*, literally “practices” in Italian.

³ While Ortner's entire body of work is of course a development of her theoretical approach, I am thinking particularly of Ortner's seminal work “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture” (1974) and Ortner 1984; 1996; 1999; 2004 for the purposes of this paper.

⁴ I am specifically thinking of Lévi-Strauss's (1997) *Tristes Tropiques*, Malinowski's (1984) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, and Benedict's (1989) *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*.

⁵ See Clifford and Marcus's (1986) *Writing Culture* for the seminal work on these types of critiques. *Writing Culture* in my mind, however, lacks any really wonderful examples of the kind of writing the authors thought anthropologists should be doing. Behar and Gordon's (1995) *Women Writing Culture* contains numerous well-written, compelling examples of this type of writing. Contemporary ethnographies that I have particularly enjoyed reading are Michèle de La Pradelle's (2006) *Market Day in Provence*, Harry West's (2007) *Ethnographic Sorcery*, Wolcott's (2002) *Sneaky Kid and Its Aftermath*, many of the papers contained in Beriss and Sutton's (2007) *Restaurants Book*, McCall's (2000) *Dancing Histories*, Shaw's (2002) *Memories of the Slave Trade*, and almost anything written by Lila Abu-Lughod or Ruth Behar.

⁶ The Official Slow Food Manifesto, written by founding member Folco Portinari, appears in the Slow Food Companion, sent to every member of the organization. In recent Companions the last line no longer appears. It can be found in its entirety on the Slow Food International web site as well as numerous Slow Food publications.

Approved by delegates from Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Denmark, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United States, and Venezuela at the founding conference of the International Slow Food Movement for the Defense of and the Right to Pleasure at the Opera Comique in Paris on November 9, 1989.

Our century, which began and has developed under the insignia of industrial civilization, first invented the machine and then took it as its life model.

We are enslaved by speed and have all succumbed to the same insidious virus: Fast Life, which disrupts our habits, pervades the privacy of our homes and forces us to eat Fast Foods.

To be worthy of the name, Homo Sapiens should rid himself of speed before it reduces him to a species in danger of extinction.

A firm defense of quiet material pleasure is the only way to oppose the universal folly of Fast Life.

May suitable doses of guaranteed sensual pleasure and slow, long-lasting enjoyment preserve us from the contagion of the multitude who mistake frenzy for efficiency.

Our defense should begin at the table with Slow Food.

Let us rediscover the flavors and savors of regional cooking and banish the degrading effects of Fast Food.

In the name of productivity, Fast Life has changed our way of being and threatens our environment and our landscapes. So Slow Food is now the only truly progressive answer.

That is what real culture is all about: developing taste rather than demeaning it. And what better way to set about this than an international exchange of experiences, knowledge, projects?

Slow Food guarantees a better future.

Slow Food is an idea that needs plenty of qualified supporters who can help turn this (slow) motion into an international movement, with the little snail as its symbol.

⁷ Meaning “Three Glasses,” the tasting highlights the top 300 wines in Italy, those presented with a three-glass rating by Vini d’Italia 2009, a joint Slow Food Editore and Gambero Rosso publication. The tasting is held on one of the two spiral ramps that climb up to the former test track on the roof of the Lingotto factory building. The €65 (at the time of this writing about

\$Canadian 105) tickets historically sell out months in advance. I did not have a ticket to the event but a research participant described it in detail, saying it was an “endurance event” that she had to gear up for every year.

⁸ I do know that Africa is a continent and not a single country, unlike a certain 2008 U.S. Vice Presidential candidate, but I don’t know enough to distinguish between the traditional dress of various African countries. Unless someone specifically told me where they were from or there was a sign, I couldn’t make a more accurate distinction than “African.”

⁹ Slow Food on Campus is an initiative of Slow Food USA to create Slow Food convivia on university campuses across the United States. University convivia are one of the fastest growing areas of membership in Slow Food USA.

¹⁰ The complete Declaration for Healthy Food and Agriculture can be found at www.fooddeclaration.org. It reads:

We, the undersigned, believe that a healthy food system is necessary to meet the urgent challenges of our time. Behind us stands a half-century of industrial food production, underwritten by cheap fossil fuels, abundant land and water resources, and a drive to maximize the global harvest of cheap calories. Ahead lie rising energy and food costs, a changing climate, declining water supplies, a growing population, and the paradox of widespread hunger and obesity.

These realities call for a radically different approach to food and agriculture. We believe that the food system must be reorganized on a foundation of health: for our communities, for people, for animals, and for the natural world. The quality of food, and not just its quantity, ought to guide our agriculture. The ways we grow, distribute, and prepare food should celebrate our various cultures and our shared humanity, providing not only sustenance, but justice, beauty and pleasure.

Governments have a duty to protect people from malnutrition, unsafe food, and exploitation, and to protect the land and water on which we depend from degradation. Individuals, producers, and organizations have a duty to create regional systems that can provide healthy food for their communities. We all have a duty to respect and honor the laborers of the land without whom we could not survive. The changes we call for here have begun, but the time has come to accelerate the transformation of our food and agriculture and make its benefits available to all.

We believe that the following twelve principles should frame food and agriculture policy, to ensure that it will contribute to the health and wealth of the nation and the world. A healthy food and agriculture policy:

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1. Forms the foundation of secure and prosperous societies, healthy communities, and healthy people.
 2. Provides access to affordable, nutritious food to everyone.
 3. Prevents the exploitation of farmers, workers, and natural resources; the domination of genomes and markets; and the cruel treatment of animals, by any nation, corporation or individual.
 4. Upholds the dignity, safety, and quality of life for all who work to feed us.
 5. Commits resources to teach children the skills and knowledge essential to food production, preparation, nutrition, and enjoyment.
 6. Protects the finite resources of productive soils, fresh water, and biological diversity.
 7. Strives to remove fossil fuel from every link in the food chain and replace it with renewable resources and energy.
 8. Originates from a biological rather than an industrial framework.
 9. Fosters diversity in all its relevant forms: diversity of domestic and wild species; diversity of foods, flavors and traditions; diversity of ownership.
 10. Requires a national dialog concerning technologies used in production, and allows regions to adopt their own respective guidelines on such matters.
 11. Enforces transparency so that citizens know how their food is produced, where it comes from, and what it contains.
 12. Promotes economic structures and supports programs to nurture the development of just and sustainable regional farm and food networks.

Our pursuit of healthy food and agriculture unites us as people and as communities, across geographic boundaries, and social and economic lines. We pledge our votes, our purchases, our creativity, and our energies to this urgent cause.

¹¹ Native Foods meaning foods produced and harvested by Native Americans in the United States. Featured foods included heritage wild rice from the Ojibwe White Earth Reservation, bison meat, seaweeds, and other grains and legumes. There were also demonstrations showing how acorns were ground and prepared to eat, all presented in a booth/pavilion made from woven California tule grass, a traditional material used by California Indians for making baskets and huts of varying sizes.

¹² I use the present tense here deliberately as I think it can be argued that, despite the existence of the term “post-colonialism”, that in fact we do not live in a *post*-colonial world. The global economic system, built upon the spoils of colonialism, still relies on cheap labour and a consumer “back home” (however the definition of “back home” may have expanded) to buy the goods.

¹³ Viertel had been a member of the Slow Food USA board before his hire. Prior to being hired by Slow Food, he co-founded Yale University’s Sustainable Food Project. Through this project Yale transitioned to a locally sourced, sustainable food program for all campus food services. This includes using produce from an on-campus organic farm started by Viertel.

¹⁴ The meaning of the word radical, much like local, global, good, clean, fair, etc. is a flexible, or “plastic” one, depending on who is using it. See Poerksen’s (1995) *Plastic Words: The Tyranny of a Modular Language* for a fascinating exploration on how these are particularly deployed within the global, neo-liberal capitalist system. It is a subject, like so many others, that I would have liked to have explored in detail had I the space.

¹⁵ Of course, the whole concept of what tastes good is a slippery one. Fermented, hardened milk in the form of cheese may taste good to a Western European palate and induce feelings of nausea in an East Asian palate. Fermented chicken eggs with a well-developed chicken fetus might be a delicacy to Phillipinos and a horror to many Canadians. The concept of appealing taste is essentially a cultural one, so of course Slow Food must run into issues of cultural domination/subordination when it comes to determining who decides. The organization tries to be culturally sensitive, however, and listens to local Slow Food groups regarding their definition of *good*, not simply the Italian or Western European definition of *good*

¹⁶ The current Canadian Ark of Taste consists of: the Canadienne cow from Quebec, the Chanteclair chicken from Quebec, herring spawn on kelp (a British Columbia First Nations traditional food), the Montreal Melon, the Nova Scotia Gravenstein Apple, Red Fife wheat, the Great Plains bison, Miner’s Lettuce, the Saskatoon berry, and the Nodding Onion. The last three, and most recent additions to the Ark, are wild foods and had an interesting journey to the Ark. While Miner’s Lettuce and the Saskatoon berry are not necessarily endangered – both grow wild in many areas in western Canada – the practice and knowledge surrounding gathering and eating all three of these wild foods is in danger of disappearing. Saskatoon berries and the Nodding Onion were both staple foods of indigenous bands across western Canada and the knowledge of when, where, and how to gather (as well as wild cultivation methods such as burning to promote more growth) is disappearing as elders die. More information on each of the Canadian Ark products can be found at www.slowfoodfoundation.org. An interesting note about the addition of these wild foods to

the Ark: Slow Food Canada had to push the Foundation for Biodiversity to update the Ark criteria to include wild foods. The conflict over changing criteria created by Italians is indicative of a larger struggle Slow Food faces in general between Italo-centric ideas about how things should work and those of English-speaking countries. I would have liked to explore and analyze this much further but it is a long chapter in and of itself and is one of the many things I wasn't able to do given the written length and time constricts of this project.

¹⁷ In the students' opinions there didn't seem to be any, but I my guess is that it might have something to do with the fact that they first learned about olive oil in Italy, from Italians, tasting Italian olive oil. The Italians, like the French, are notoriously biased when it comes to the superiority of their food.

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Appendix

UBC BREB Certificate of Approval

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The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Naomi M. McPherson	INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/UBCO IKE Barber School of Arts & Sci/UBCO Admin Unit 1 Arts & Sci	UBC BREB NUMBER: H08-00263
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
Institution N/A	Site N/A	
Other locations where the research will be conducted: in the field - at the Slow Food International offices located in Bra, Italy; the Slow Food Terra Madre conference in Turin, Italy		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Tabitha Steager		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)		
PROJECT TITLE: Food Politics and the Slow Food Movement - an Ethnographic Study		
REB MEETING DATE: April 24, 2008	CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: April 24, 2009	
DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:		DATE APPROVED: May 12, 2008
Document Name	Version	Date
Protocol: Research Proposal - The Slow Food Movement and Culture Change	N/A	April 10, 2008
Consent Forms: Oral Informed Consent Form	2	May 1, 2008
Written Informed Consent	2	May 2, 2008
Other Documents: Slow Food Initial Approval Letter	N/A	April 10, 2008
The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
<p align="center">Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:</p> <hr/> <p align="center"> Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair Dr. Ken Craig, Chair Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair </p>		

BREB Certificate of Approval – Minimal Risk Amendment

<https://rise.ubc.ca/rise/Doc/Q/ASRQ2URJDO1KR8C5PHNG3...>



The University of British Columbia
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK AMENDMENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Naomi M. McPherson	DEPARTMENT: UBC/UBCO IKE Barber School of Arts & Sc/UBCO Admin Unit 1 Arts & Sci	UBC BREB NUMBER: H08-00263
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
Institution		Site
N/A		N/A
Other locations where the research will be conducted: in the field - at the Slow Food International offices located in Bra, Italy; the Slow Food Terra Madre conference in Turin, Italy; the Slow Food Ireland Terra Madre conference in Waterford, Ireland; and in Paris and Montpellier, France in local Slow Food Convivia (membership groups)		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Tabitha Steager		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)		
PROJECT TITLE: Food Politics and the Slow Food Movement - an Ethnographic Study		

Expiry Date - Approval of an amendment does not change the expiry date on the current UBC BREB approval of this study. An application for renewal is required on or before: April 24, 2009

AMENDMENT(S):	AMENDMENT APPROVAL DATE: July 11, 2008	
Document Name	Version	Date
Consent Forms:		
Oral Informed Consent Script	3	July 10, 2008
Written Informed Consent	3	July 10, 2008
The amendment(s) and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board		

Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
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