

## SLOW FOOD AND HOME COOKING: TOWARD A RELATIONAL AESTHETIC OF FOOD AND RELATIONAL ETHIC OF HOME

Lynn Walter

**Abstract:** This study examines whether Slow Food and other alternatives to “fast food” develop a relational aesthetic of food that effectively addresses the practical and strategic interests of mothers in relation to children. It also asks what role women have played in creating these alternatives and the extent to which they frame their actions in feminist discourses. Focusing on Italy and the United States as paradigmatic cases with which to analyze gendered food practices in relationship to slow food and home cooking, it is argued that the capacity of alternative agrifood networks to address both the immediate practical need for adequate and appropriate food for everyone while pursuing the long-term strategic interest in the sustainability of the agrifood system would be enhanced by an intergenerational time frame. The interests that mothers have in feeding their family could provide such a time framework for a politics of sustainable consumption.

Slow Food, as a form of resistance to “fast food,” identifies time and place as fundamental to the quality of food—locally, traditionally, and artisanally produced—to be “good, clean, and fair” (Petrini 2007, Schlosser 2002).<sup>1</sup> In its “convivia” form Slow Food also connotes the sustaining, non-commodified relationships of caring and solidarity, reinforced by commensality (Sobal and Nelson 2003). By associating Slow Food and other agrifood alternatives with a “relational aesthetic,” Murdoch and Miele (2004) recognize the embeddedness of food in local/regional networks supported by closer, more transparent connections between producers and consumers as one of the aesthetic qualities of slow food. This study extends their concept of “a relational aesthetic” to include domestic co-producers and co-consumers, whose aesthetics of food appreciate not only its sensual properties but also whose food they eat and with whom they eat it (Bell 2002). It analyzes the extent to which “home cooking” may be fruitfully conceptualized within a relational aesthetic of cooperation, commitment, and care—qualities of which speed is no measure. These are the qualities that infuse food with the *terroir* of home.

Of the caring and carework that habitually fall to women home cooking is particularly evocative. “Home cooking” declares the correspondence between the

feminine gendered work necessary to create and sustain the next generation and the site of familial commensality (Moisio, et. al. 2004). Gender as a difference in relation that constructs and is constructed by feeding and being fed is changing in relationship to "fast food" and the "McDonaldization" of the dominant agrifood system and to resistance to it by alternative agrifood networks, exemplified by Slow Food (Ritzer 2001). This examination of gendered food practices centers on home cooking because home is a location identified with reproduction of family and gender as non-commodified caring and responsibility. Home is a location where gender interests intersect with those of the generational interests—most significantly, those of children, whose presence in the home initiates women's "right to feed" and children's "right to be fed" (Van Esterik 1998). Home is a site of 'socializing taste' (Och et. al. 1996) in the context of socializing sociability, particularly in the practice of familial commensality (Bell and Valentine 1997, Julier 2002). Analyzing the gendered and generational discourses of slow food and contemporary studies of home cooking and commensality will address the question of how "home" has been constructed as time and place (Lupton 1994).

The relational quality of "home" is located both outside and inside of the market, outside in that "home cooking" is imagined to be based upon non-commodified relationships; and inside in that the market depends upon the time women spend on consumption and other reproductive activities. Although the "super heavy users" of McDonald's in the U.S. are younger men (Julier 2005: 181), marketers know that it is women who are the principal food purchasers, while doubtless catering to the appetites of men and children (Warde 1997: 317, McIntosh and Zey 1989). Women's work as food consumers, which routinely takes the highly commodified form of grocery shopping, is performed as the part of the everyday practice of home cooking. The paradoxical location of "home" forms one basis of women's critique of and resistance to carework. In the gendered performance of carework and valuing of caring, home makers are presented with an ostensible Hobson's choice between caring for oneself and caring for significant others. Another provocation is the "time bind" created by women's participation in the labor force and unpaid carework, a bind from which "fast food" serves as a temporary escape for the individual consumer. In contrast to individualist timesaving strategies like fast food, Hochschild (1997) advocates a collective "time movement". Whether Slow Food is such a movement depends upon its capacity to mobilize the resources of home cooks with a project that takes them into account.

Critical analyses of Slow Food question whether those with low incomes, most significantly, female agrifood and domestic laborers and their children, can afford slow food. They also ask whether slow food addresses the problem of women bearing a disproportionate share of the burden of its "slowness" through their gendered performance of food preparation, food service, and the clean-up of food

waste, from the kitchen to toilet in the family, the field, and the factory (Allen and Sachs 2007, Avakian and Haber 2005, Barndt 1999, Chrzan 2004, Donati 2005, Eyerman 1999, Gaytán 2004). In post-industrialized countries, the trend towards smaller families and more single-person households, along with cuts in social welfare and food security funding, indicate more individuation and less solidarity, more fast food and less home cooking (Bell and Valentine 1997: 78). Nevertheless, since mothering is a relational practice and women's gendered performance of it is evaluated by their ability to feed their families, low-income and employed women work hard at juggling the shopping, cooking, cleaning, and arranging schedules to ensure that commensality and a "proper meal" are created (Counihan 2004, DeVault 1991, Van Esterik 1999). The decline in birth rates in several European countries to below ZPG suggests, however, that there are limits to their willingness to reproduce the family, even in Italy, the birthplace of slow food and fewer babies (Krause 2005). With these critiques in mind, this study examines whether Slow Food and other alternatives to "fast food" develop a relational aesthetic of food that effectively addresses the practical and strategic interests of mothers in relation to children. It also asks what role women have played in creating these alternatives and the extent to which they frame their actions in feminist discourses.

#### SLOW FOOD

Slow food is multi-faceted. First, it is the organization established in Bra, Italy in 1989 by Carlo Petrini and 61 associates, which has since grown into an international network with over 80,000 members, represented by national organizations and a rapidly expanding number of local chapters or "convivia" around the world (Slow Food International 2008). Undergirding the network is a slow food critique of "fast food," which Ritzer (2001) has identified with the broader process of "McDonaldization," the rationalization, standardization, industrialization, and globalization of agrifood and, by extension, other sociocultural institutions. Moreover, Slow Food is a part of a larger social movement that brings together an array of agrifood activists working for environmentally sustainable and economically viable agriculture, on food security and food safety concerns, on fair labor practices in agriculture and food-processing, and, like Slow Food, on preserving food traditions and biodiversity embedded in local and regional foodsheds (Lang 1997). What draws them together as a movement is their insistence upon devising strategies that simultaneously develop all of their common goals, which Slow Food has succinctly identified as "good, clean, and fair food". To do so, food producers, processors, and marketers must understand these broader connections, and so too must consumers. By understanding these connections, it is argued, consumers will be able to see through commodity fetishism and begin to act as food citizens,

demanding food policies and practices that ensure the reproduction of food traditions, decent livelihoods, sound environments, and the well-being of future generations. Lastly, Slow Food as an organization brings a special dimension to the agrifood movement---the pleasures of food and, by extension, the sensual and relational qualities of an aesthetic of food.

#### SLOW FOOD AND HOME COOKING IN ITALY

Italy and the United States are paradigmatic cases with which to analyze gendered food practices in relationship to slow food and home cooking (Fischler 2000, Gordon 1998). As the archetype of fast food, the U.S. stands in contrast to Italy, the home of Slow Food. McDonaldization of the agrifood system is commonly identified with Americanization in articulations of the problems of contemporary agrifood systems—environmentally destructive, unsustainable agricultural practices; processed, unhealthy, artificially-flavored food; exploited agrifood laborers; the deconstruction of family and society into rushed, atomized eaters, who don't even take the time to sit down to eat. In contrast, Italy is imagined as its antinomy—small farms worked by happy peasants; tasty, homemade food eaten leisurely; diners gathered cheerfully around the table as the sun sets over the Tuscan hills---and Americans are not the only ones who hunger for this and want to buy it (Donati 2005, Gaytán 2004). However, as an “imaginary” of everyday life, as opposed to a tourist attraction, the central figure is an Italian woman preparing a delectable, made-from-scratch, multi-course meal.<sup>2</sup> And she, as imagined, cannot be bought.

Noteworthy by their absence from this imaginary are the substantiation of her non-commodified status—her young children. Their absence as well as that of any other dependents in need of personal feeding carework, figuratively distinguishes public and domestic eating.<sup>3</sup> Feeding is dependency carework, and the one responsible for it is overwhelmingly female. Above all, feeding the child is a practice firmly associated with mothering as a relational practice.<sup>4</sup> When children are in the picture, the women and men interviewed by Counihan (2004, 1999, 1988) for her studies of food and family in twentieth century Florence can relate to the pleasures of the table as part of a relational aesthetic of food. It is an aesthetic that recognizes feeding the family as a practice serving intergenerational interests through everyday and lifelong carework. As Counihan explains “meals were important because they affirmed family, produced sociability, and conveyed sensual and convivial pleasure on daily and special occasions (2004: 121).” Commensality created relations of intimacy that “implied reciprocity, care, and serious commitment (134ff).”

The Italian focus on pleasure in food pre-dates slow food (Counihan 2005; Gordon 1998: 93). A study by Och and colleagues (1996) on “socializing taste” in late 20<sup>th</sup>

century Italian families demonstrates that they still prioritized pleasure in their interactions with their children at the dinner table. The dinner conversation was mostly about various ways of eating, preparing, and procuring food. The meals contained several dishes to reflect the taste of different family members (Och et.al. 1996). Children learned to converse about food at the relatively sophisticated level, discussing, for example, what ingredients complement each other in specific dishes (Krause 2005:150). "These family dinner practices indicate that individual tastes are recognized as an important component of one's personality, to be respected and nurtured (Och et. al. 1996: 40)." The attention mothers paid to feeding their children was not limited to what their children ate at home. For a case in point, Krause reports being surprised that the most hotly debated topic among mothers at a school meeting was the quality of the school lunch program.

This particular group of women, some professionals, others artists, viewed themselves as progressive and so perhaps it was no surprise that they poked fun at themselves for having returned to the topic of food. As one mother put it as the [school] meeting came to an end, "*sempre si torna a mangiare*"--- "It always comes back to eating (2005: 149)."

Their discussion reflected a set of values around food that connect concern for children's well-being with the goal of socializing them through commensal practices to appreciate the qualities of a relational aesthetic of food.

Even though Italian mothers have long placed high priority on the pleasure of food and familial commensality in their home cooking, Slow Food founders still declare the need to reclaim the right to pleasure. In so doing they are primarily concerned with the educating the public to appreciate the taste of "endangered foods" made by artisanal producers in opposition to the homogenized tastes of mass produced food and in response to competition from global enterprises represented by McDonald's. They see themselves as the educators of consumer taste rather than as purveyors of the taste of contemporary home cooking (Miele and Murdoch 2003: 32). In part, this distinction is related to Slow Food's origins in changes in Italian politics and opposition to EU policies standardizing food safety regulations in ways that strangled traditional local artisanal food production (Leitch 2003: 441, Parasecoli 2003). Notwithstanding its roots in defense of small-scale commercial food production, Parasecoli asserts that there is a place for feminism and gender issues in Slow Food, a position based upon his conviction that: "...in the organization of external work and domestic life that is prevalent in the West, women are increasingly freed from the preparation of meals, cooking is no longer considered a female task, a typical expression of a patriarchal society. Instead, it

becomes an occasion for conviviality and enjoyment which men also play an important role (2003: 38).” The data do not support his optimism. While some Italian men have taken up cooking, typically as an occasional special event or to fill in for an absent wife, most domestic duties, including feeding the family, are still highly associated with the gendered practice of mothering (Bell and Valentine 1997: 70; Counihan 2004:92, 118; Romano and Ranaldi 2007; Warde, et. al. 2007). Furthermore, Parasecoli does not account for the planning and coordination, shopping, serving, and cleaning up that accompany commensal occasions of conviviality in its familial and its more purely commodified forms, tasks which command gendered and classed labor.

It is clear that feeding the family remains a highly gendered practice. Nevertheless, there have been significant changes in Italian women’s lives during the past generation that have led to women spending less time on home cooking. These societal changes are related to the post-WWII economic expansion, which provided an increasingly urban population with a higher standard of living. Associated with prosperity, the families have become smaller with fewer extended families living together (Counihan 2004: 86); at the same time, couples are marrying at a later age, and young adults are waiting longer to look for work and to leave their natal home (Krause 2005: 9). The birthrate has also declined to among the lowest in the world at 9.3 (per thousand people) (Counihan 2004: 160, Krause 2005: 67). Today busy mothers are spending somewhat less time on cooking, and men are spending marginally more time on it. In addition, Counihan (2004: 171) saw indications that fathers were taking a somewhat more involved role in primary childcare.

The consumer society also raised people’s standard of living and created new middle-class consumer identity. This new identity meant that in families who aspired to a higher class status, women had to work harder at maintaining their homes and their families’ appearance (Krause 2005: 74-77, 2003: 354). Presenting a gendered class distinction made compromising their high standards of homemaking a disreputable option; and without an extended family member, typically a grandmother, around to help, something else had to give way to make time. One response by Italian women has been to have only one child, thereby enabling them to nurture their child to a standard expected by their status. They also responded by purchasing more prepared foods (Counihan 1988: 58). Since the economic concentration of retail and food production makes it difficult for local/regional producers, processors, and restaurants to compete in the prepared food market, this latter tendency is one reason that Slow Food as an organization is promoting the embedded quality of food through the development of more transparent connections between producers and consumers (Helstosky 2004: 163).

#### HOME COOKING, ABUNDANCE AND AFFLUENCE

The trend for home cooks to spend less time cooking by purchasing more processed food has been documented for other western countries as well. For example, in their study of time use in France, U.K., U.S., Norway, and the Netherlands comparing the 1970s and the late 1990s, Warde et.al. (2007) found a decline in the amount of time spent cooking in all countries and a decline in the amount of time spent eating in all but France. Also, more meals are being consumed outside the home, which Miele and Murdoch (2003: 28) attribute to abundance and affluence. Despite discovering similar trends between the U.S. and European countries, Warde and his colleagues noted that the European countries were at the point in the late 1990s in the amount of time cooking and eating that the U.S. was in the 1970s. If Miele and Murdoch's hypothesis is correct about abundance and affluence being positively correlated with consumption of processed foods in Italy, then it is possible that the earlier adoption of such foods in the U.S. can be partially explained by its coming out of WWII in relative prosperity compared to Europe. The question of whether job creation associated with this relative prosperity might help to explain why mothers of children up to 16 years of age in the U.S. have maintain their family's class status by being employed at a rate of 66.7% in 2005, whereas for Italian mothers the employment rate is 48.1%, is complicated by intervening sociocultural variables (OECD 2007).

Also less strictly related to abundance and affluence is the lower birthrate in Italy than in the United States. Italians, whose total fertility rate was 1.34 in 2005, have been slightly ahead of western trends, and it is the U.S. that is lagging behind at 2.05 in 2005 (OECD 2007). Krause (2005) notes that the modernization hypothesis, while it predicts smaller families overall, does not explain the differences between birthrates in wealthier countries and suggests that sociocultural factors are also influencing family size. In the case of Italy it may be, as previously indicated, that mothers have such high expectations for home making and other carework, they can only lavish it on fewer children. At the level of public support for dependent carework, the smaller family size could also be related to the fact that, compared to other western European countries, Italian children up to age two are less likely to be in institutional childcare (OECD 2007). In either case, the fact that the Italian practice of home cooking is focused on the pleasure of food and conviviality connects Slow Food with roots that go deeper than the recent period of abundance and affluence. Paxson (2005) asks how Slow Food translates as it spread from Italy to the more health conscious and economically neoliberal United States. Ultimately, her question directs attention to a larger one about how the meaning and practice of fast food and slow food is affected by sociocultural contexts (Wilk 2006a).

## FASTER FOOD AND HOME COOKING IN THE UNITED STATES

As in Italy, feeding the family in the United States is a gendered relational practice with women taking primary responsibility, even among couples who expressly support cooperative forms of familial carework (DeVault 1991). Of the nearly half of DeVault's interviewees who thought familial carework should be cooperative, having children in the home made it less likely that such carework would be shared in practice (1991: 26). Furthermore, employed women tended to reduce the time they spent feeding the family and to train their children to do some of it, rather than to wait for their husbands to take more responsibility (DeVault 1991: 97-99, Moio 2004: 362). Thus, as DeVault describes U.S. middle-class families with dependent children, their stated ideals of cooperative home cooking and parenting have resulted in only marginal shifts in the gendered practices of home cooking.

Still, DeVault found that most mothers place great value on the shared family meal and invest time in trying to make it happen, even as job, school, and other activities outside the home make it more difficult to coordinate family schedules. According to child development research, children's psychological and physical health is supported by regular familial commensality (Fulkerson, et. al. 2006). Given the importance mothers and health experts alike place on family meals, the increased demands on women's time, and, Warde (1997:151) adds, "the absence of concessions and compromises by men", it is not surprising that more and more women have turned to an individualist consumer strategy, like the use of convenience foods in home cooking to save time. From one perspective processed foods may even serve a feminist agenda; as Inness argues, "The frozen fish stick, the TV dinner, macaroni and cheese in a box, and other convenience foods are the women's movement's unlikely helpers (Inness 2006: 37)."

Given the value mothers attach to familial commensality, Och and her co-researchers (1996) did not anticipate their findings that American parents and children frequently disagreed with each other at the table about which foods tasted delicious or inedible. They note that "The cross-generational divergence in taste contrasts with the cross-generational solidarity that dominated Italian family meal interactions (1996: 34)." In the U.S. case the cross-generational disagreements were at least partially related to cultural categorization of food into adult foods and children's foods, categories that Italians did not recognize in their meal conversations. A related reason is the contrast between the focus on health that parent use to try to get their children to eat the food that is good for them and the efforts by advertisers who promote cross-generational disagreement by telling children to insist on the food that the grown-ups don't like. Some mothers concede to their children's tastes to get them to eat

enthusiastically and not waste food; and low-income mothers may not have much fresh produce available to them (Allen and Sachs 2007:11). Alternatively, Namie (2008) attributes the fact that children's food choices diverge from adults' to child development goals of socializing independence and self-reliance by encouraging children to decide for themselves what they want to eat. No doubt based on permutations of all of these factors, children are indeed making more of their own decisions about what to eat, sometimes at a cost to their own health.

Since more children are choosing what they want to eat from the processed food array promoted by food advertisers and more mothers' are using the individualist strategy of faster food preparation to accommodate their time bind and still provide family meals, it is not surprising that many in the younger generation know little about the sources of food and consider home cooking to be "having to mix stuff" (Moisio et. al. 2004: 373). Complicating this picture though is the higher priority on food as nutritional health in the U.S. than in Italy (Och et.al 1996, Paxson 2005). Like pleasure in Italy, health as a priority in food has a long history in the U.S. (DuPuis 2002, Levenstein 2000). This priority has promoted the growth of "enriched" convenience foods and, more recently, organic foods (Lohr 2001). It has also led mothers to support efforts to remove soda and candy vending machines from schools (Murnan et. al. 2006). While these approaches maintain the cultural priority on health, a promising alternative approach is the development of curricula around school gardens and kitchens. This strategy, promoted by Slow Food USA among others, serves the Slow Food goals of knowledge of food as a source of pleasure in eating it (Chrzan 2004).

The relatively poor nutritional choices and health status of U.S. children would seem to contradict the avowed U.S. priority on food as nutrition (NCHS 2004). Although these concerns for children's health are real, they are exacerbated by U.S. socioeconomic patterns dividing home cooking by class and race (Abarca 2006, Allen and Guthman 2006, Block 2004, Inness 2006, Williams-Forson 2006). Class, race, and region affect mother's ability to fulfill her "right to feed" in ways that doubly disadvantage low-income mothers and their children (Van Esterik 1998). In the U.S. context, the linkage between abundance and the growth of fast food is premised upon agrifood policies supporting cheap food made possible, in part, by those working in low-waged jobs in agriculture, the agrifood industry, and paid carework (Barndt 2002, Schlosser 2002). It is they who bear a disproportionate share of the burdens of the "fastness" of commodified food.

Compared to other wealthy countries, the critique of "fastness" in everyday life in the U.S. is grounded in more insecurity and related structural time binds with fewer social welfare programs, fewer paid holidays, less sick leave, no paid family leave, fewer labor contracts, and a greater economic divide (Hochschild 1997,

Schor 1991). The relative paucity of public sector support for social security along with the higher employment rate of mothers and adolescent children in the U.S. help explain why one of Krause's interviewees observes that "Italians *schizzano*, or rush, when they have to, when they work. But Americans are always rushing around even when they don't have to. It's a disease (2005: 63)." As a form of resistance to fastness, slow food taps into that dis-ease (Jabs et. al. 2007).

The slowness imaginary provides fertile ground for Slow Food in the U.S., which has grown to 170 convivia across the country (Slow Food USA). The picture it paints is attractive: "Slow Food is also simply about taking the time to slow down and to enjoy life with family and friends (Slow Food USA)." It is one that women and men, middle and low-income families alike can relate to. Further, the Slow Food goal of clean food appeals to U.S. priority on health in food. Slow Food's celebration of pleasure of food brings the body to bear on positive motivations for a relational aesthetic of food which could position food itself, the environment, co-producers/preparers, and the consumers/co-eaters in relations of cooperation, commitment, and care---relations served better by slowness than fastness. "For instance, feeding a child in half of the time increases household productivity in an economic sense; however, it might decrease the satisfaction with and hence motivation for such an activity" (Reisch 2001: 371). Also, by including the goal of fairness in its goals of "good, clean, and fair food", Slow Food recognizes the inequalities of the prevailing agrifood system, thereby providing a basis on which to extend a relational aesthetic of food.

The path to the realization of such all-encompassing goals requires the cultivation of a relational aesthetic of food with those whose time is on a tight budget. As Parkins argues, "Work, family and gender are significant factors in the constitution and perpetuation of temporal disparities and inequities in contemporary culture, which problematizes any simplistic notion of implementing 'slower' living across the board, or a desire for 'slower' living being a universal one (2004: 367)." For example, by inviting people to join Slow Food USA because "Every day can be enriched by doing something slow - making pasta from scratch one night, seductively squeezing your own orange juice from the fresh fruit, lingering over a glass of wine and a slice of cheese - even deciding to eat lunch sitting down instead of standing up." they seem to be excluding all children and low-income people as well as busy mothers. In contrast, fast food has set a place for them at the table (Bembeck 2005, Reiter 1999). So too must slow food if it is to offer an authentic alternative.

#### PRACTICAL AND STRATEGIC GENDER AND GENERATIONAL INTERESTS

Mothering is a relational practice in which feeding the family is shaped by the critical intergenerational dimension of time (Jabs et. al. 2007). Because it is a

lifelong commitment, mothering calls for managing time in the next few hours and, simultaneously, in the next few decades, a time span that poses questions of priority in carework. For example, feeding a child what he or she wants might make for a more pleasurable meal for everyone at the time, but in the long term it might be harmful to the child's health. Molyneux's (1985) distinction between practical and strategic gender interests parallels this short-term and long-term time dilemma, stipulating its political significance. In the context of women's movements, she analyzes how political organizing to meet immediate practical needs for food, water, and shelter tends not to address the structural roots of the problem, usually because to do so would bring powerful interests to bear against the practical interests and because of a lack of sufficient resources to successfully oppose them. On the other hand, political organizing around long-term goals tends not to address the immediate practical interests of ordinary people in their platforms and programs of action (Walter 2003, 2001). This is typically because the activists' socio-economic status is high enough that their personal short-term practical needs are already being met and because they have more political resources with which to confront opposing forces, in this case patriarchal sociocultural structures and the concentrated socioeconomic power of dominant agrifood systems. Extending Molyneux's analysis to new agrifood movements, their capacity to address both the immediate practical need for adequate and appropriate food for everyone while pursuing the long-term strategic interest in the sustainability of the agrifood system would be enhanced by an intergenerational time frame. The intergenerational dimension of mothering means that practical and strategic interests that mothers have in feeding their family could provide such a time framework for a politics of sustainable consumption (Desai 2001, Shiva 1988, Vileisis 2008). Of course, this assumes that mothers do have a "strategic interest" in their children that constitutes a long-term commitment that motivates them to act politically.<sup>5</sup>

Many pleasant and painful food memories are of childhood and being fed, usually by mother, but also by grandmothers and aunts, and fathers (Lupton 1994, Counihan 2004, DeVault 1991). As a relational practice, mothering responds to the eating practices of children, who have desires of their own expressed in divergent son and daughtering relational practices. As Probyn cautions, "The claustrophobia of being cooked for and being fed is an important undertow beneath the bucolic images of eating together (2000: 38)." For example, Italian mothers' attention to different tastes and the focus on individual pleasure create a deep emotional dependence between the generations (Och et. al. 1996). That dependence is especially deep between mothers and sons, because the division of labor in the household is such that daughters learn to shoulder food responsibilities while sons seldom do (Counihan 2004:150). Although many are nostalgic, some food

memoirs tell of generational conflicts over food (Lupton 1994, Winegardner 1998). "Ours was discomfort food," discloses Dufresne (1998: 85). Other narrators look back with chagrin as the child becomes a parent and repeats the patterns of home cooking that she had so stubbornly rejected (Gall 2003). The fact that children grow up to have children of their own is what sustains and confounds home cooking across the generations.

The extent to which generational interests around food are conflicted is related to gendered interests expressed in reproductive and mothering practices. Italian women's decisions to have fewer children and U.S. women's decision to use processed foods and then worry about their children's health exemplify this relationship. Because food is both a practical and strategic interest, food politics, including Slow Food and the broader sustainable consumption project, must address its relationship to reproduction. Home cooking as a mothering practice already does so with all of the conflict and the cooperation that goes into balancing gender and generational interests and the immediate needs and long-term interests of children. That it does so at the cost of gender inequity has been the crux of feminist ambivalence toward home cooking.<sup>6</sup>

#### FEMINISM AND HOME COOKING

Allen and Sachs (2007) and Micheletti (2006) note that women are activists in new agrifood movements; and Slow Food has some very prominent women in its leadership—e.g., Wangari Maathai, Vandana Shiva, and Alice Waters. Allen and Sach (2007:2) ask why it is then that "...while women engage in significant and far-reaching efforts to change the system, few of these efforts focus specifically on improving gender relations." Since Boserup's 1970 pioneering work on women and agricultural development, feminist scholars have confirmed her conclusions on the critical role that women play in agriculture and food provisioning in Africa and criticized her work for failure to examine the relationships that integrate market and domestic production and reproduction (Benería and Sen 1981). In a more recent example, Counihan (2004) and Krause (2005) both point out that the extent of Italian women's work in paid domestic production was obscured by the assumption that paid work done in the home was women's home making. After nearly forty years of making this same critique, it is apparent that there are powerful symbolic and material barriers to conceptualizing the relationship between production and reproduction. In part, this difficulty is replicated in reflexive critiques of feminist politics.

Reborn in the 1960s at the height of the civil rights movement, the "new" U.S. women's movement focused its politics primarily upon discrimination against women on the basis of sex. Middle-class women were discriminated against, they argued, not only in the domestic sphere of reproduction and home making but

also in the public sphere of production and governance. Based upon this analysis, middle-class feminism challenged both forms of discrimination, claiming the right to their own bodies, to participate fully in the public sector, and to share the tasks of homemaking and childrearing with men in the home. Low-income women who felt the politics of anti-welfare push them into the labor force and devalue their homemaking, their mothering, and, by implication, their children, challenged middle-class feminists' failure to see the intersection of mothering as a gendered practice with mothering as a classed and raced practice. In contrast, Italian feminists inherited class analyses of the "woman question" from their strong left political parties. Nevertheless, they too found it difficult to integrate women's insights into ways that family, reproduction, and culture oppressed women into pre-existing analytical categories focused on production (Ferrari 2008, Krause 2003). Along with race and sexuality, the intersectional problematic of gender and class forms the critical political basis for poststructuralist analyses of gender as a socially constructed practice. From a different angle, the political focus on women's rights has also been a barrier to the analysis of the politics of food in relation to feminism, because an individual rights perspective does not fit comfortably into an analysis of the human condition of dependency that necessitates mothering and other carework (Gilligan 1982, Kittay 1999).

#### TOWARD A RELATIONAL ETHIC OF HOME

In their recent work on historical studies of women and food, Avakian and Haber (2005) argue that the time is right for "feminist food studies." One avenue is the work by feminist scholars on a relational conception of self that would accommodate self-interest as connected to the interests of others (Kittay 1999). This conception of self also allows for generational changes in self rather than assuming a discrete self that "cling[s] to the idea that, at least, an aspect of us is not affected by time (Curtin 1992: 141)." Drawing upon work on the ethical implications of a relational, continuous concept of self, Whatmore proposes a "re-cognition of formal justice along with a creative engagement with the ideas of human nature, in terms of the predicament of finitude, decay, and mortality (2002: 151)."

Theoretical and practical undertakings in alternative agrifood networks, as well as in feminist studies, are well timed to initiate a "re-cognition" of formal justice and human nature. There is a significant effort by scholars, Slow Food, and other sustainable consumption activists to bridge the knowledge gap between food producers and consumers and to address the analytical separation of production and consumption so that consumers can act politically to promote quality food and fair livelihoods (Goodman 2002, Goodman and DuPuis 2005). Another contribution is Allen's (2004) work calling for greater attention to gender as a

critical variable in shaping access to resources in alternative agricultural movements. Meredith E. Abarca (2006) addresses the creativity involved in Mexican and Mexican-American women's work in the kitchen as a basis for thinking about working class women's subjectivity and agency. Deborah Barndt's (2002, 1999) research on the impact of NAFTA and on women's labor in the commodity chain is a significant example of the kind of work that is moving analysis forward on the links between gender, class, and agrifood systems.

From a feminist studies perspective, Kittay (1999) examines the political implications of dependency by applying a relational concept of self. Keeping in mind that "we are all some mother's child" and specifically pointing out that mothers are also some mother's child, Kittay argues that it is the responsibility of the larger society to support those who do the carework. This social responsibility for the careworker opens "home" to justice claims of fairness and equality based not upon the rights of the abstract individual but upon the social value of well-being through the connections of dependency carework, both paid and unpaid. "In a global economy of constant flow and movement, *homeless is powerless*, at the mercy of the tides and currents, unable to find a place of refuge...Wilk 2006b: 203)." It is a relational ethic of home that recognizes the homeless person as some mother's child and offers her a place at the table. Because they incorporate feminist and environmentalist approaches in their analyses of alternative agrifood networks, Whatmore (2002) and Curtin (1992) both argue that the relational self must be conceptualized not only in relation to other people, but also to the environment. Since home is where eating connects consumers to nature most intimately, to conceive a hybridity linking our relational, continuous selves to nature would be a step toward an even more inclusive conception of home.

"Home" is imagined in moments of perfect conviviality and moments of deep despair. Home is a key reproductive site of nature/culture hybridity, where the naturalness of eating is profoundly shaped by women's time. It is women's time that is taken for granted and devalued; and it is women's position in the home that is assumed and confining. It is, therefore, in this conflicted time and place that Slow Food needs to take gender into account, if its relational aesthetic of food is to be integrated with a relational ethic of home. Slow Food as an organization and slow food as a critique of fast food must address the gendered nature of responsibilities for feeding the family to reach its goals of good, clean, and fair food. Then home cooks might find the time to partake in slow food. Their participation in the formation of a relational aesthetic of food would support a relational ethic of "home" that opens the door to non-familial others in the relations of "intense, diffuse, and enduring solidarity."<sup>7</sup> In turn, a more inclusive conception and practice of home would support the goals of slow food and sustainable consumption.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Sustainable Consumption and Alternative Agri-Food Systems Conference, May 27-30, University of Liege, Arlon, Belgium. When referring to the official Slow Food organization, the title case font is used; when referring to “slow food” as an idea, it is printed in lower case font.

<sup>2</sup> Parasecoli (2003: 35) quotes Stefano Bonilli, editor of *Gambero Rosso*, in a 1999 interview as saying, “We were saying that high-end consumption is also a cultural thing; you have to be intelligent and have knowledge. *If once a year* you decide to spend money on a good dinner, a good wine, a good product, or a good trip, it’s better that someone else do the research for you, someone who’s free from any form of conditioning (emphasis added).” In this version of the Slow Food “imaginary,” the cook is typically male, and the occasion is not one of everyday life.

The concept “imaginary” is borrowed from Appadurai (1996). It implies an image that is mass-mediated and transnational carrying symbolic responses to globalization.

<sup>3</sup> Klemmer (2000) notes that heterosexual couples with dependent children living with them do not constitute a majority of households in either Italy or the United States. It could be argued on this basis that Slow Food does not need to take that particular group of food consumers into account in order to mobilize a thriving and effective alternative agrifood movement but can simply focus on same-sex couples, opposite-sex couples without dependent children, unpartnered housemates, and singles as its participants. However, this position overlooks the importance of reproduction to society, to socializing taste, and to promoting a relational aesthetic of food. It also does not take into account the fact that almost everyone will be in a mothering relationship at some time in their lives, as a child, a mother, or both.

<sup>4</sup> Identifying mothering as a relational practice of caring and carework allows for the possibility that either sex could be in this relationship with a child or other dependent person. However, I have chosen to use the word “mother” throughout in order to take into account the fact that women do more mothering than men do.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, the assumption of maternal interest in her child does not reflect reality in all cases. This fact is one reason why Held (1997) prefers the term “mothering person.” That is, a “mothering person” is anyone who is vested enough in the interests of the specific child to be responsible for meeting its physical and emotional needs and whose self is in relation to the child, whether that mothering person is female or male. She might be the “other mother” that Patricia Hill Collins (2000) finds so supportive for African American families. The term “mothering person” might also be applied to someone who does paid carework for the child, assuming that person cares about the child as well as cares for it. However, as

used here, a mother is someone in a mothering relation to the child, which denotes a lifelong commitment that paid carework usually does not.

<sup>6</sup> Home can be a location of violence against women and children, which is also a reflection of power as a dimension of the relational practice of gendered intimacy as expressed in home making (McCloskey et. al 2002, Price 2002). Although power is a dimension of all relations, it can be used for the most dreadful harm in the context of home, where the expectations of care are greatest. Rather than glorifying "home" though, one purpose here is to address its weaknesses by building on its strengths and to relate both to the question of its relationship to sustainable consumption.

<sup>7</sup> "Intense, diffuse, and enduring solidarity" is central to Gary Witherspoon's (1975: 22) extensive definition of Navajo kinship. Without these qualities there is no kinship, and sharing food is one way of demonstrating them. "Just as a mother is one who gives life to her children through birth, and sustains their life by providing them with loving care, assistance, protection, and sustenance, kinsmen are those who sustain each other's life by helping one another, protecting one another, and by giving or sharing of food and other items of subsistence. Where this kind of solidarity exists, kinship exists; where it does not exist, there is no kinship (p. 22)." My conception of the relational aesthetic of food as based upon the qualities of cooperation, commitment, and care is indebted to his thinking on Navajo kinship.

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