

# Graduate Association for **Food Studies**

**Title:** Book Review of *Food Between the Country and the City: Ethnographies of a Changing Global Foodscape*

**Author(s):** Amanda S. Green

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## Food Between the Country and the City: Ethnographies of a Changing Global Foodscape Nuno Domingos, José Manuel Sobral, and Harry G. West, eds.

London: Bloomsbury. 2014. 251 pp.

*Food Between the Country and the City* uses Raymond Williams's 1973 classic *The Country and the City* as an analytical filter to understand rural to urban foodways in contemporary societies. An edited volume, it is composed of eleven essays written primarily by scholars from SOAS at the University of London. The book's editors, Nuno Domingos, José Manuel Sobral, and Harry G. West, weave together ethnographic narratives from multiple authors and settings. Perhaps what each piece does best is identify, through ethnographic and archival research, what underlies, is experienced, or is even erased by use of the words "country" and "city" in conceptualizing foodways. A certain beauty emerges in using these words as analytic points of departure: they call forth related tropes, whether industrial and artisanal, conventional and organic, modern and traditional, or local and global.

The volume opens with an introduction that clarifies just how Williams's work can be applied to food and foodways. The editors argue that despite the transformations of recent decades—a more urban world population and increasing global connectivity—the tropes of country and city persist "even if their respective constellations of meanings have partially shifted over time" (3). As Williams once did, the editors explain that the nature of tropes depends upon specific historical moments. That is, the precise meanings of country and city are the result of processes of selection, emphasis, neglect, and exclusion of particular moments. Thus, today's industrialized and urbanized nations have come to symbolize lifestyle related diseases and the insatiable consumption of the countryside's resources. The introduction can be read on its own, simply to understand the myriad ways Williams's observations can be applied to contemporary foodways.

The book is broken into three subsections, focusing on foods of the country, the city, and the nation. In Section I, the authors identify characterizations of the country's foodways, largely constructed by individuals and institutions in the city. These representations are then contrasted with the lived experiences of ethnographic participants. Nuno Domingos's study of Portugal's Alentejo wine region identifies a sharp contrast between the lives of the region's inhabitants who experience emptiness due to outmigration, fewer jobs, and declining public services; and the work of wine marketers who represent that emptiness as idyllic village life. Emma-Jayne Abbots's study of ideal type representations of *cholas*, rural female food producers of highland Ecuador, reveals that the lives of these real-life *cholas* are not as imagined. Real *chola* women are forced to navigate a series of binds, generated by others' expectations of their *chola*-ness. Finally, Elizabeth Hull portrays how food insecure South Africans celebrate the qualities of Zulu foods in contrast to the grocer's fancier foodstuffs, and West illustrates how Saint Nectaire cheese producers define their engagement with heritage tourism as simply a continuation of their family's traditional production of cheese. These chapters expose not just the contradictions and binds generated by the disjuncture between the discourse and reality of rural spaces, but also how individuals of the country engage and refashion these discourses to their own purposes.

In Section II, the lens shifts to the city, where the authors look closely at foodways in urban to rural areas. These include Laura Delind's engaging critique of celebrated urban agriculture projects, in which she argues that urban gardens will not solve urban decay on their own and are quite problematic because they do not engage with the realities and wishes of urban inhabitants. Johan Pottier and Maria Abranches carefully complicate the binary division of urban and rural food production. In Malawi, Pottier identifies how urban migrants maintain ties to their rural homes to ensure food security throughout the year. Abranches's research in Guinea Bissau reveals a

food continuum, from production in Guinea Bissau to consumption in Lisbon, that satisfies migrants' desire for food from home. Interestingly, Williams's voice drops to its lowest pitch in this section, eliciting the question of whether his observations are more difficult to apply to urban foodways and their discourses or if the authors found other frameworks more appropriate.

The final section addresses the concepts of rural and urban foods in the context of nationalism, dealing extensively with the historic development of national foodways. From Sobral's description of the historic development of Portuguese gastronomy to Maria Yotova's research on the growth of Bulgaria's national yogurt culture, these pieces reveal the importance of mythmaking (particularly of the rural) undertaken by scholars, government agencies, and marketing firms to create specific regional or national foodways. Sami Zubaida takes us to the sixteenth-century work of an Egyptian religious scholar who ridicules the foodways of the peasant population, offering a distinct contrast to the lauding of rural foodways undertaken in other regions and times. Finally, Monica Truninger and Dulce Freire discuss the conflicting narratives and lived realities that underlie perhaps one of the most mythologized foodways, the Mediterranean Diet. These chapters contribute to a discussion of the country and city at a different scale, looking more closely at the ways in which different locations (cities and nations) and the producers of their discourses impact one another.

The volume builds on previous research often undertaken on Slow Food, for example by Rachel Laudan, Jeffrey Pilcher, and West. These three, among others, have pointed to the contradictory nature of current and historic food organizing. Such projects tend to be put in place by or for city dwellers who in turn expect to assist peasant food producers through valorization of their products. However, these projects often advance the interests of urbanites far better than rural livelihoods.

The volume is especially appropriate for those working in rural and urban studies and can easily

be assigned for undergraduate and graduate level coursework. Rural to urban foodways are addressed from many disciplinary perspectives (history, literature, geography, and anthropology), so scholars looking for comparative ethnographies of food will also be interested. Individual chapters will be of interest to those with related regional and topic focuses, though the material is heavily weighted towards Portugal. And for those interested in Williams's work, the intrigue of this volume remains, in large part, due to the strength of his original insight. What the editors give readers, where perhaps many food anthologies fall short, is a comprehensive theoretical perspective from which to analyze the plethora of ways humans produce, consume, represent, and interpret contemporary foodways.

#### **BOOK REVIEW | SERENITY SUTHERLAND**

### **Drinking History: Fifteen Turning Points in the Making of American Beverages** *Andrew F. Smith*

*New York: Columbia University Press. 2013. x, 250 pp.*

America has an ebullient past of diverse and shifting beverage tastes that intersect histories of politics, economics, social movements, and global influences. This is the story Andrew F. Smith tells by analyzing important historical moments in *Drinking History: Fifteen Turning Points in the Making of American Beverages*. Like a narrative mixologist, Smith throws together seemingly unlikely ingredients: beer, wine, rum, cider, whiskey, tea, coffee, milk, bottled water, juice, and soft drinks. The book is not organized by individual drinks per se; Smith focuses on time periods such as colonial diversity and the temperance movement as he traces the development of American drinking habits. For instance, the chapter "Colonial Diversity" examines the beverages of colonial society including familiar drinks such as rum, beer, wine, and brandy, as well as mixed drinks that are less familiar: syllabub, posset, flips, shrubs, and cherry bounces. Similarly, the chapter "To Root Out