Abstract

Food is an engine and source of metaphorical meanings that permeates our life. Apples can incorporate references of sin or toxin or simple land life, and tomatoes, blood and love. Fast food symbolically represents for many items of the American Dream. Olives are seen as signs of peace. However, foodstuffs are not only the source, but also the target of metaphorical meanings, contrary to the central dogma of Lakoff and Johnson that there is only a one-way traffic from target to source. In daily life, we use an elaborate system of implicit metaphorical references in tasting food: a glass of Bordeaux wine tastes like berries, in oysters some taste a kiss and others snot. In this essay, four different types of life- and food-styles on the basis of the work of Mary Douglas are distinguished: hierarchy (traditional, authentic, natural food); enclave (elitist, high-culture food); competitive individualist (fast food); and eclectic individualist (i.e., slow food). It is argued that in particularly the second and fourth individualizing food-styles synesthetic metaphors play a larger role than in the others. This implies that Douglas’s contention that the metaphors are not based on material reference but on social categories alone cannot be upheld. Moreover, I show on the basis of qualitative research that there is intensive border crossing between the four types of lifestyles which is also contrary to Douglas’s theory; these four styles allow for ambivalence and ambiguities and are not strictly separated from one another. Finally, the metaphors used in
framing foodstuffs and nonfood things like persons convey respect and discrimination as well. Because metaphors function in the distribution of respect and nonrespect, they have an inherent ethical component.

Introduction: Metaphors and Food

In Mali, Maurice Mamanlawal Salé, from the private charity Eden, is angry. Normally, in times of lesser yields of the national staple-crop sorghum, people eat wild plants and certain insects. However, because of the lesser value that nowadays is attached to these plants and insects and the higher respect that Western foods have due to their metaphors for respectful living, Malians do not collect these foodstuffs anymore. From this example, it is clear that the question concerning which things are edible or not is not only dependent on pure factual information and knowledge, but that metaphors play a role as well. Metaphors are not only humorous or accidental plays of words that command our attention—in this case, in selecting edible and nonedible things. Even more, as George Eliot said in *Middlemarch*, we act accordingly: “We all of us, grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them.” Food metaphors, in other words, allow us to select food items and simultaneously to include and exclude other people with which we share or not our food preferences.

In this essay, I will not only describe the use of food in metaphors elucidating nonfood things, as in the expression “food for thought,” but in analyzing the use of metaphors regarding food, I will also give some “thought for food.” Contrary to one of the central dogmas of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, that a metaphor comes from one source and gives meaning to a target, my contention is that food can be used as both targets and sources of metaphors: food functions as a source of metaphors, and food and its concomitant practices function as an object or target of metaphors. In fact, we have to take into account several practices of food: production, shopping (obtaining ingredients), cooking, and serving and eating. These practices are, in many premodern cultures, closely connected, but in modern and postmodern cultures separations among them are occasionally deep and many sub-distinctions can be made (for example, agricultural

production is distinguished from processing, packaging, transport, and selling).\textsuperscript{4}

Consumers' food choices are not determined by pure facts, because these are framed by metaphors that are often deep-seated in patterns of activity, habits, rituals, and daily practices. Many social scientists have observed that consumers' choices are not purely factually determined, and some have complained about the irrationality of consumers. Below, this kind of complaint shall be explained as originating in a typical food culture that uses the term "fact" in a special, indeed metaphorical, sense. However, as the above example from Mali indicates, more than purely factual information is at stake: values, standards, and their associations are formulated in metaphors, which in the case of food are often metaphors taken from the body, nature, or society.

What Food Metaphors Do

To paraphrase George Eliot, "metaphors steer our attention and we act on the strength of them."\textsuperscript{5} Some items we don't accept as foodstuffs and these things we don't incorporate into our diet, although we could do so; other foodstuffs we know we shouldn't eat. The wild plants and insects in Mali no longer represent the ideal life, and therefore they are suspect. We act fatally on the strength of metaphors, even to the point of risking famine.

Mary Douglas has very thoroughly studied the role of metaphors in food choices and taboos in several cultures. She defines a metaphor as "[a]ll metaphorical identification depends on making a match,"\textsuperscript{6} in the same way as Lakoff and Johnson state that "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another."\textsuperscript{7} "Shared similarity expressions" could be the explication of metaphors: they are shared and establish a match between things and events in the world. But Lakoff and Johnson's statement with respect to what food metaphors do is unduly strict, because metaphors do more than making things understandable: food metaphors also organize humans into different groups, they distribute in an unequal way status to these groups by incorporating different appeals to the body and senses. Eating beef was for a long time an essential part of being British, which distinguished a

\textsuperscript{4} Michiel Korthals, \textit{Before Dinner} (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004), chap. 3.
\textsuperscript{5} Eliot, \textit{Middlemarch} (above, n. 2), p. 111.
\textsuperscript{7} Lakoff and Johnson, \textit{Metaphors We Live By} (above, n. 3), p. 5.
person from other nationalities and confers respect.8 The French eat frogs, and this precisely describes their character and makes them not respected—for the beef-eating British at least. And in the above example regarding Mali, consuming insects makes one a native, a local, which is distinguishable from being a modern American, and nowadays it decreases self-respect. The strength of these metaphorical distinctions cannot be exaggerated: metaphors regarding edible things (respectful eating) are connected with feelings of respect, joy, and socializing; metaphors of nonedible things are connected with distaste, sometimes even disgust. In this latter case, metaphors function as taboos, which dictates eating behaviors and distinguishes from less respected others who don’t comply with these taboos.

There is no evidence for innate (genetic) preferences for certain types of food or for rejecting other kinds. Certainly there is some kind of innate preference for sweetness, but not for other tastes and not for certain foodstuffs; young children, for example, eat everything.9 This is called the “omnivore’s dilemma”: humans can eat everything and lack innate preference for things that are healthy or stimulate their well-being. Culture is the main factor that probably explains the way metaphors dictate our eating behavior and the concomitant distribution of respect. Metaphors are organized in food cultures10. Following Émile Durkheim11 and Claude Lévi-Strauss12, Douglas starts with the idea that all metaphors are exclusive of social origin, and that there is no place for the materiality of the referents of the metaphors. She understands food cultures and the divisions between edible and nonedible things in terms of general, clear-cut opposites like culture versus nature, individual versus group, male versus female, fresh versus processed, dry versus fluid, and cold versus warm.

10. As Paul Rozin, and April Fallon state (“A Perspective on Disgust,” Psychological Review 2:14 [1987]): “Disgust is triggered not primarily by the sensory properties of an object, but by ideational concerns about what it is, or where it has been. In fact, we conceptualize disgust as a distinct form of food rejection, different from rejections based on bad taste or on fear of harm to the body.”
I will show that these divisions are not so clear-cut, and that there is a lot of room for interpretation, irony, and ambiguity—in short, for dynamics between the divisions. Moreover, these divisions never cover all things, many falling in between these categories or are at least ambivalent, and are not viewed as “pure” pure or “safe” safely edible, but as partly pure or partly safe (or pure or safe in certain contexts and not in others). Metaphors that cross the domain of the five senses do play an important role here, because they are factors in the dynamics of the divisions between what is edible and what is not (concomitant to the distinction between people we have to respect and those we don’t have to respect, in which a dynamic is also at work). Finally, I will show that the material referents play a more substantial role than Douglas allows for.

Food as a Source of Metaphors

According to Lakoff and Johnson, “[t]he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.” They distinguish very clearly between target and source, and according to them, a metaphor moves only in one direction and not vice versa. Apparently, food is used metaphorically (as a source) to identify certain people (target), as the British do when they call themselves “beef-eaters” and the French “frogs-eaters,” or the Japanese when they call themselves “rice-eaters” as opposed to other cultures, be they meat-eaters or otherwise. It is not only because all human beings need food to survive that it is such a fundamental aspect of our experience, but also because that with food, we experience in one way or another the intrinsic connection between the body and (cultured) nature, between life (survival) and death (of the living being, like a plant or animal), between flourishing and decay (food runs the risk of becoming rancid, reminding us of the frightening aspects of our bodily existence), between power and disrespect (the mighty eat “better” food than the powerless), and between feeling good and feeling anxious (our first feeling of well-being was while being nursed as a baby). Because of these diverse experiences, “eating” and “being eaten” has many different metaphorical meanings. In the United States, “sweet” is often associated with women, “beefy” for men, such as in the following lyrics:

Sugar, ah honey honey
You are my candy girl
And you’ve got me wanting you.
Honey, ah sugar sugar
You are my candy girl . . .
When I kissed you, girl, I knew how sweet a kiss could be
(I know how sweet a kiss can be)
Like the summer sunshine pour your sweetness over me
(Pour your sweetness over me)
Sugar, pour a little sugar on it honey,
Pour a little sugar on it baby
I’m gonna make your life so sweet, yeah yeah yeah.13

Many metaphors use the process of preparing food in typifying thought processes, such as in “I can’t swallow that thought” and “intellectual nibbling”; the desire for food is used in characterizing other motivations, as in “hunger for books,” “sexual appetite,” and “voracious reader.”

Food as a Source and Target of Metaphors: Four Food Cultures

Food doesn’t only give rise to metaphors and foodstuffs are not only sources of metaphors, but they are as well subjects of metaphors in the sense of targets. Food is ordered according to metaphors. I will focus here on the metaphors we use in talking about and acting with food. For example, we describe foodstuffs as energy pills or we taste Italy in the parmesan cheese or something else is evoked in soul food, we can distinguish between the blueberry scent from the walnut taste in the Burgundy wine. The metaphors we use to characterize food are innumerable and thus we need some kind of systematization. Therefore I will first draw attention to four broad types of food cultures and their metaphors that command our understanding of food, and its concomitant notions of who is responsible for the quality of food, and notions of the various social functions of food. Then I shall describe in detail the way the senses are conceptualized by these metaphors.

Mary Douglas makes a distinction between weak and strong organized interactions (roles and so on) and between groups that do not differentiate themselves from other groups. This is called group/grid oppositions. These oppositions indicate a continuum from a socially strong group where members are determined by society, to weak groups where individuals have more freedom to participate in other groups also. Grid oppositions also show a continuum from more hierarchical groups that do not allow for negotiations on roles, to other groups in which individual freedom is paramount. These group/grid oppositions can be depicted on horizontal and vertical axes, as in Table 1.14

The table’s axes cover values and issues, respectively, from relative to absolute and from subjective to objective. “Relative” in the horizontal axis means that reality is viewed as socially constructed; “absolute” means that reality is viewed from the point of view of nature. On the vertical axis are “subjective,” which means that individuals are viewed as more important, and “objective,” which means that society or the group is viewed as more important. The horizontal and vertical axes intersect, resulting in four quadrants. The two axes give four types of society, which are shown in Table 2. These four types are, beginning clockwise at the upper right: hierarchical; enclavist individualist; market egalitarian; and isolated, eclectic individualist. The culture of the latter is also called “isolate” and “prefers to avoid the oppressive controls of the other forms of social life.” Together, the four quadrants classify, in a fairly general and universal manner, orientations in societies and cultures. According to the above-mentioned theory, these four orientations or strategies mutually exclude one another, which means, for example, that it is

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<tr>
<th>Degree of social differentiation</th>
<th>High Grid</th>
<th>Low Grid</th>
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<tr>
<td>High group</td>
<td>High grid, low group e.g. Doormen</td>
<td>Low grid, low group e.g. homeless men</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low group</td>
<td>High grid, high group e.g. US Marines</td>
<td>Low grid, high group e.g. members of cults with an ideology of equality</td>
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<th>High Grid</th>
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<td>Intensity of group membership</td>
<td>High Group</td>
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Table 1. Group/Grid Oppositions.

Source: Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis, and Aaron Wildavsky, Cultural Theory (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990).
impossible simultaneously to use the market egalitarian and the hi-
erarchical perspectives. The divisions are not reconcilable and they
cannot be compromised, because they comprise incompatible organ-
izing principles: “Any choice which is made in favor of one is at
the same time a choice against the others.”¹⁵ Once an organization
is, according to market egalitarian, made a market society, one can-
not live with hierarchical or other principles: “A choice is an act of
allegiance and a protest against the undesired model of society.”¹⁶

Table 2. Cultural Map.

| Isolates: by choice or compulsion, alone or isolated in complex structures (eclectic values). | Hierarchical: hierarchy, strongly incorporated groups with complex structure. |
| Market egalitarian: weak structure, weak incorporation (competitive individualism). | Enclavist individualist: enclave, strongly incorporated groups with weak structures (e.g., egalitarian groups). |


Translated into food choices and food ideologies leads to the fol-
lowing four food cultures. According to the four quadrants in Table
3, there are four broad types: in the hierarchical culture, food is seen
as unspoilt nature (regional, authentic cuisine); in the enclavist in-
dividualist culture, food counts as an exclusive identity item (high
culture); in the market egalitarian culture, food is viewed as fuel (fast
food); and in the isolates culture, food is taken as a form of conver-
sation (slow food).

Table 3. The Four Food Cultures.

| Eclectic individualist (identity) | Hierarchical Naturalness, tradition (nature) |
| Egalitarian informative | Enclavist individualist Individualized, Conversation, and cooperation: new (conversation) |


The hierarchical culture is oriented toward the traditional way
food is produced and distributed; it emphasizes the naturalness of
these traditions that belong to certain localities. In this culture, re-
gional cuisines are distinguished and cherished; they produce food-

¹⁵. Ibid., p. 42.
¹⁶. Ibid., p. 43.
stuffs with essential value and having a true and authentic nature. For this reason, according to this perspective, food products have static qualities, referring to their traditional origin: tradition, authenticity, and naturalness hold supreme, absolute value. Food advertising in this culture constantly evokes tradition and nature. The most authentic type of food counts here as a utopia.

The enclavist individualist culture is defined by the low integration/high integration axes. This regime stresses a specific subject or system of values expressing an exclusive “world vision.” The principal aspects of this quadrant are exclusiveness and uniqueness. Products are associated with prestige and luxury, and are presented as powerfully captivating, irresistible, and as the fulfillment of irrepressible desire, often by the use of irony, simile, and transgression. Typical objects of this narrative strategy are clothing, jewels, and perfume. The exclusiveness and uniqueness that define this quadrant are expressed in the food sector where the consumer is perceived as a gourmet. These characteristics of food are not defined as objective elements in the real world, but are presented as dependent on the tastes of an exclusive and unique subject, the gourmet—namely, the discerning expert who knows about good food. Food functions as differentiation of personal identity.

The market egalitarian culture is concerned with objective information on food quantities such as the number of calories, food safety, and its contribution to the nourishment of the population. In its egalitarianism, this type of culture is interested in food for all, as a kind of fuel. The body is a big bag, the senses are opening pods, hence measurements such as nutrients, price, time, weight, and so on play an important role. In this culture, the discourse on food is about counting, measuring, weighing, and time-saving, rather than about taste. An extreme example is the competitive-eating subculture, which has organizations and even a judge from the International Federation of Competitive Eating, the largest organization, which sanctions events like the “Wing Bowl.” Mr. Fagone, a writer for Philadelphia Magazine, covered the Wing Bowl and then plunged headlong into it, attending 27 contests and spending a lot of quality time with ‘gurgitators’ like David Coondog O’Karma (known as Coondog), ‘tag-team bratwurst champion’ of Canton, Ohio, ‘the tiramisu’ champion Tim Janus (Eater X) and Bill Simmons (El Wingador), a 322-pound New

17. French cuisine is an example; see Peter P. Ferguson, Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Jersey truck driver and five-time Wing Bowl champion."19 Other examples regarding food as fuel are food as a tiny item, as a pill, or even as breathable food.20

Finally, the isolates culture of the subjective/relative quadrant is characterized by a perspective that presents the interaction and integration of the three different aforementioned cultures. In food, this perspective disregards traditions and opts for creativity, the de-ritualizing of meals, and cooking innovations such as new dishes and new combinations. Food is viewed as a conversation with all cultures and cuisines, with all senses and edible things.

These four cultures are interesting research tools though probably do not cover all the food types possible.21 These are confirmed in recent books by Peter Singer and Jim Mason and Michael Pollan that also distinguish the first three types (fast food, natural, and exclusive),22 without, however, referring to the scheme and argumentation of Mary Douglas. But instead of searching for confirmation of these four types, it will be more fruitful to find out where the scheme elucidates food cultures and where not.

Dynamics of the Four Basic Food Metaphors

Although Douglas repeatedly emphasizes that the four cultures are not compatible, in reality they are; moreover, they sometimes mix. I did some empirical research on metaphors used in food advertisements, and in particular focused on synesthetic expressions of food. In daily life, these expressions are used frequently, such as “sweet” music or “dark” thoughts. These synesthetic metaphors are distinguished from neurological synesthesia, whereby people, in hearing about a color, immediately see that color, or by smelling something, they envision it.23 Individuals having synesthetic perceptions associate vision in terms of some other sense. This is not a common trait; however, very common is the use of synesthetic lan-

21. For example, is seems justifiable that we can distinguish a fifth food culture that comprises health food; that is, the orientation of all consumption and production of food toward the value of staying healthy; see Korthals, Before Dinner (above, n. 4).
guage and synesthetic metaphors when, in particular, talking about and dealing with food.24 I analyzed advertisements, because they are the modern icons and guidelines in dealing with food; in fact, they comprise “how to” rules for food rituals. Advertisements not only recommend products, but also the way in which they should be prepared and consumed; they prescribe the ritual of eating according to certain life- and food-styles. In this way, they establish a connection between public ritualized emotions and private emotions that emerge when cooking and eating.25

The advertisements appeared in Italian and Spanish newspapers, leaflets from the international organization Slowfood,26 and from Dutch newspapers. The Italian advertisements appeared in a weekly magazine called D di Repubblica: La Repubblica delle Donne, distributed on Saturdays along with the newspaper Repubblica and targeted at a mainly female upper-middle-class public (the “D” in the title stands for donna [woman]). The issues published between March 14, 2004 and April 30, 2005 were examined. Research therefore included a detailed analysis of fifty-four issues and 195 advertisements. The Spanish advertisements are from El Semanal and Mujer Hoy, two of Spain’s most popular magazines, both being weekly supplements of ABC, a national newspaper, as well as of twenty-five important regional newspapers. Both magazines are popular, but they differ significantly in terms of content and target audience. In this case, research focused on food advertisements published throughout 2004 in El Semanal and Mujer Hoy, for a total of fifty-two issues per magazine. The results were the following on the basis of the work of Guido Nicolosi, a co-worker in the EU project “Ethical Traceability.”27

The majority of the Italian food advertisements belonged to the hierarchical quadrant: fifty-three out of sixty-five ads with a given text (sometimes the same brand and/or product is presented through different texts). (Of the 195 advertisements surveyed in toto, ninety-six [49 percent] belonged to this quadrant.) Quantitative analysis, however, revealed an interesting fact: that the majority of the ads belonging to the hierarchical quadrant used the typical tools of market egalitarian advertising to suggest the health qualities of products.

There are references to the ingredients of products, often presented in terms of percentages, references to the processes of food production, and information on nutritional values (fat, protein, minerals, fiber, and so on). Specifically, twenty-two out of thirty-three hierarchical advertisements adopt rational and informative elements in support of their “argument”; when considering the “diachronical impact” (frequency, also counting repetitions), this approach increases to forty-nine appearances out of ninety-six (51 percent).

Combining the data of the two Spanish magazines, the overall results are the following: out of a total of ninety-five ads, more than half (fifty-four) adopted the market egalitarian culture as the dominant discursive form; a respectable twenty-seven adopted the hierarchical culture; and only fourteen used the two other individualized cultures (seven each).

Discussion

First, some results from my analysis of the market egalitarian food culture (food as fuel and the fast-food-style). The metaphors used are not synesthetic at all; they connect foodstuffs on the basis of standardizations that ultimately are chosen because they allow measurements that are connected with price, calories, volume, and time (of cooking and/or consumption); this list can be expanded with, for example, types of nutrients, fats, and sugars. However, it is clear that this market egalitarian culture is not without metaphors, because the human body is viewed as a big bag or engine, the senses are openings pods only, food is considered fuel. Its metaphors derive from machines, moving objects, measuring instruments, and all are more or less connected with quantities. The senses do not seem to play a large role, other than the visual.

In the food-style of hierarchical culture, nature as socially ordered and regulated plays a dominant role in the metaphors employed: images of unspoiled nature as authentic, artisanal processed, traditional, tranquil, regional, and as being stress-free. In the advertisements reviewed, an easy connection was made between cultural icons such as castles and churches and food products. One consumes not only parmesan cheese, but also a representative monumental building.

A highly significant example of a food’s territorial and cultural associations is found in the advertisement for Parmigiano Reggiano. In the foreground is a whole Parmesan cheese, with the brand name clearly visible on the rind. The cheese is surmounted by photographs of five important monuments from five well-known cities of the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy. This collage of photos un-
derscores the “monumental” status of the product. Like the depicted monuments, the cheese also functions as a symbol of a geographical area famous for its food products. For this reason, the product is presented “as unique as its origin” in the headline. The upper half of this headline suggests the long tradition behind the product (‘seventy years’), stressing the fact that “this extraordinary example of nature and wisdom [is a] gift [from] generations of the place of origin.” Thus tradition, territory, and nature are merged in a single message.

In the third food culture, enclavist individualist, frequent use is made of metaphors that emphasize the unique personal quality of food, which makes its consumers special people. Only special types of food produce an “exclusive identity.” The metaphors employed indicate that readers of these advertisements are special people by making sensual associations among exotic or less well-known qualities: wine tasting like blackberries or nutmeg, for example. Here, synesthetic metaphors are often used, in particular for taste and smell.

In the texts and advertisement of this kind of food as conversation style there are many images of different cultures, which convey impressions of cosmopolitanism. The search for new dishes and ingredients is actively promoted. Interestingly, the metaphors used cover more conversation and communication than in the three other food cultures. In slow-food magazines, metaphors are encountered like “convivium,” “salone del gusto,” and “arc of taste”; these have a unifying meaning because they refer to particular social manifestations of producing, cooking, and eating food that bring together members of this food culture. Eating and enjoying food are used as metaphors for living the good life and traveling to places where such gourmet food is made and enjoyed. Traveling, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching are viewed not only as ways of enjoying food, but also appreciating its production practices and localities. For instance, it is said that one should “fully taste the various aspects of the landscape.”

Inter-metaphoric Traffic: Ambivalence and Distribution of Respect

As mentioned above, according to Douglas, there exist strict distinctions among the four types of cultures and consequently be-

tween the four food cultures. It was found, however, that ambiva-
lence among these distinctions and their symbols and metaphors is
often the rule. Informative metaphors from the egalitarian culture
are often combined with the naturalness of the hierarchical. In the
case of health-food advertisements and the combinations of person-
alized nutrition, a new mix emerges in which competitive individu-
alized food is merged with the informative elements of the isolate
and enclavist cultures; individualizing the body’s nutrition makes it
simultaneously more natural and personal (second and fourth food
cultures). Even the conversation food-style occasionally makes use
of items of health information and naturalness—for example, in al-
luding to a broad definition of health as “well-being” and in respect-
ing artisanal production.

This ambivalence and loosening of rigid distinctions has wider
implications. It is Mary Douglas’s assumption that metaphors do not
have any connection with the objects they stand for—that is, only
nonmetaphoric words have a material reference: “The temptation to
let resemblance do the work of explanations is strong because coher-
ence of metaphors works very well as an interpretative rule within
one culture. Remember that similarity is culture-dependent.”29 But
this correspondence between the nonmetaphoric and metaphoric
use of words with, respectively, material and social references is too
schematic. Metaphors emerge out of our practices with nature, ei-
ther our own bodies or those of others; nature in this twofold sense
is an infinitely complex system and resists all kinds of rigid schemat-
izations. Our perceptions and experiences of nature are simultane-
ously made possible and enforced by nature; both are socially and
naturally constructed.

Nevertheless, in the theory of Douglas, both should be kept sepa-
rate: the first doesn’t say anything about the second, or, more gen-
ernally, nature doesn’t say anything about social distinctions. This gen-
eral “dogma” has far-reaching consequences, because it also implies
that connections made by metaphors are not founded by the mate-
rial references at all, but exist only due to social constructions. It is
plausible, however, that the two individualizing cultures—enclavist
individualist and eclectic individualist (i.e., elitist and conversation
food-style)—pay more attention to the body and its relationship
with nature, spirituality, and nonmaterialist values, because inher-
ently, individuals, in contrast to societies, have bodies with senses
and activities. Societies do not taste or smell or touch, which makes
references (even metaphorical ones!) to sense organs rather difficult.

In this sense, it seems inevitable that metaphorical references are made to resemblances in the outside world and act as anchor points, even in the scheme of Douglas. And indeed, as was seen as a result of empirical data collection, the individualizing cultures explicitly use synesthetic metaphors while the egalitarian and hierarchical do not, simply because in these cultures, individual features do not count.

Moreover, returning to the example with which this essay commenced, inter-metaphoric traffic does not imply that the metaphors are subjected to a process of peaceful exchange; on the contrary, the metaphors are used in all kinds of marketing strategies to attract consumers. From the producers’ point of view (the supply side), targeting the right groups of people means selling more products. Inter-metaphoric traffic (or not) is used in a complex play of attraction and repulsion that can have far-reaching consequences such as shortages of certain types of food and even famine, as was seen in the example of Mali. Metaphors used in taboos of food exclude both the food items and the people that eat them. In this sense, metaphors have an ethical quality: they convey mechanisms of respect, inclusion, and exclusion, because they organize people around icons that connect them and that separate them from people that are not appealed to.

As long as these types of metaphors play a role in a level playing field, there is an equitable distribution of opportunities and chances, but if not, there is an ethical problem. In the above example of Mali, hunger is the consequence if you are compelled to choose between Western types of foods that are not available but are respected and native foodstuffs that are expelled from the market. Due to the fact that the four types of food metaphors distinguished here are connected to broader types of cultures that function in large power arenas, it is clear that the ethical component of metaphors is indeed not a simple issue.

Conclusion

It was attempted here to show that one should not underestimate metaphors of food. They direct food choices and determine which types of ingredients and meals should be neglected and what types of food confer social respect upon those individuals involved. In fact, metaphors confer the type of respect people obtain when connecting with the production, purchase, or consumption of certain foodstuffs. It is interesting to see that features of foods are used both as a domain for creating metaphors and as target of metaphors. In the latter sense, foods are classified according to metaphors. On the other hand, it was seen that food is also an active agent (source)
of metaphors; features of foods such as tastes and smells serve as “matching partners” in making associations with nonfood things and events.

Also, the use of different types of metaphors is not contingent, but dependent on life- and food-styles. The categorization of four types of styles according to Mary Douglas implies that different types of metaphors are used. Even the market egalitarian style, although it tries to be as matter of fact as possible, still uses certain metaphors to refer to food, because they are necessary as well as guidelines. In general, synesthetic metaphors for health foods were not found, but mostly a visual mixing; it seems that visual metaphors distract from health foods.

Although according to Douglas there is no place for the materiality of the referents of metaphors (she indicates that all metaphors are exclusive of social origin), it was shown that in the last two types of food-styles in particular (isolated individualism and open individualism), metaphors directly refer to bodily senses. Here, the frequent use of synesthetic metaphors for food is striking. This material reference should not surprising, because these food-styles take into account the bodies of individuals. Moreover, in all cases, irony, ambiguity, and ambivalence are features of (synesthetic) food metaphors. These features of food metaphors aptly illustrate that the complexity of food, with its four main styles/cultures, cannot be ignored in theorizing about the meaning of food.