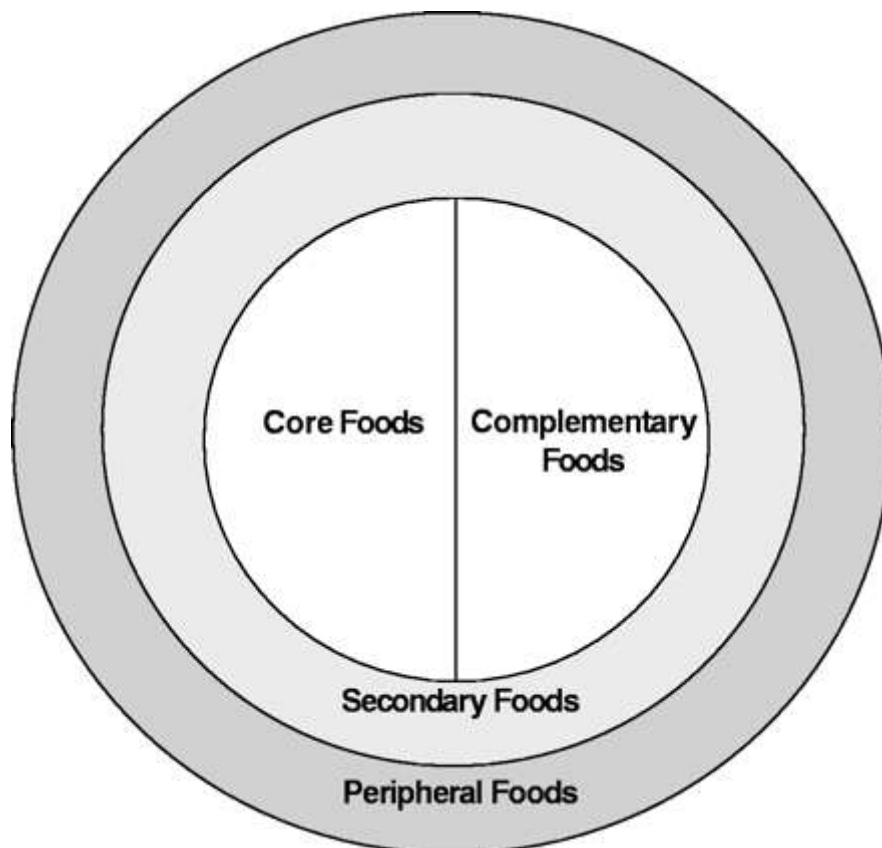


Core-Fringe-Speisen-Modell - Core Food – Fringe Food -

Mintz, Sidney W. - 1992. Die Zusammensetzung der Speise in frühen Agrargesellschaften. Versuch einer Konzeptualisierung. In: Schaffner, M., ed. Brot, Brei und was dazugehört. Pp. 13-28

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**FOOD PATTERNS IN AGRARIAN SOCIETIES:
THE CORE-FRINGE-LEGUME "HYPOTHESIS" (1)**
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[Introduction](#)

[The Core-Fringe-Legume Pattern](#)

[Core](#)

[Legume](#)

[Fringe](#)

["CFLP in Practice"](#)

[The Demise of CFLP: Fats and Sugars](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[References](#)

Introduction

During its career as a social science, cultural anthropology's strength in its approach to food rested on its capacity to provide careful description and comparison through fieldwork. Anthropologists did yeoman service in documenting that our species will eat just about everything that won't kill us, and a very large number of things that will, including raw fish livers, undercooked hamburgers, and a rich variety of poisonous mushrooms -- and to eat them by choice, no less.

Human voracity is accompanied by our disposition as a species to load food and eating behavior with meaning. Hardly anything we do in daily life is so prone to communicate our personality and character as food. Like coiffure, dress, language and body language, food -- how we eat, where we eat, with whom we eat, when we eat, how often we eat, what we eat -- "says" who we are. Anthropologists have been aware of this for at least a century; people such as William Robertson Smith, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Edmund Leach, Mary Douglas and more recently, Mary Weismantel, David Sutton(2) and many others have been telling us about it.

Yet in some areas, anthropology has done a mediocre job in helping us to understand human food behavior. We want to know in some detail how other peoples eat; and it would be extremely helpful if we knew how much they eat. Such data are difficult to obtain. To be exacting about the eating behavior of others means being there while the eating is going on, and that can mean being there all the time. That is enormously hard to bring off. Not all peoples have mealtimes like us, and may snack even more than we; often we're unwelcome; and we can't freeload all of the time on people poorer than ourselves. Hence tracking the actual intake of food can prove damnably difficult. Even brilliant scholars of food consumption, such as Audrey Richards, found it trying.(3)

Richards worked with an African farming people called the Bemba, whose favorite food was a sorghum gruel, taken with tiny quantities of vegetable, or of animal protein, to make it more palatable. For the Bemba, that was food -- all else they ate was merely a sorry substitute. Richards describes a work group that had been munching on quantities of corn on the cob all afternoon, but when asked by passersby whether they had eaten, responded by saying they'd starved all day. Maize simply wasn't considered food by them. Problems of this sort are typical of ethnographic food studies.

But if one looks at this historically, I wonder whether there might be a type of society about whose food intake one might guess in a less risky manner. During the history of

domestication, beginning perhaps twelve thousand years ago, there emerged a small number of populous agricultural states in both the Old World and the New. I have in mind, for example, the three most populous and politically organized agrarian regions in the New World; a large river system on the Indian subcontinent; a correspondingly large river system in the Middle East; and some parts of China and portions of Southeast Asia. Probably before about the mid-seventeenth century, what I have in mind might have been true in terms of food for much of Europe as well.

The Core-Fringe-Legume Pattern

I think that in the agricultural history of these regions there emerged a food pattern that may have held true for every such instance -- even though the specific foods were different from case to case. I want to develop this assertion because it could be a useful basis for comparison. But I need to stress that I'm only talking about a hunch; I do not have any real data to sustain it. I have in mind large agrarian societies. What I wish to say has no relevance for gatherers, hunters, fishermen, pastoral peoples, or modern societies of our own sort.

Restricting this solely to agricultural societies, I ask whether we can discern any features of the food system that carry over in a patterned manner from one society to another, even if the specific foods themselves vary widely. I do so by means of a three-part food typology: core, fringe and legume. In the simplest terms, the bulk food in any such diet is a complex carbohydrate, either a tuber or a cereal, which I call the core. Each such cuisine also includes a number of foods that serve to impart additional taste to the core, and I call these "fringe" foods. And though I have not done the necessary research to test whether the association holds for what is known about many different agrarian societies, I believe each such cuisine will also include a legume or pulse. I speak of this trio of categories as the "core-fringe-legume pattern," or CFLP. A familiar example might be the maize core, red bean legume, and chili fringe combination of the Mexican central plateau. If in fact such a pattern did exist as typical of old agrarian societies, how were the three elements, core, legume and fringe, interrelated in daily practice?

Core

In spite of the large variety of plants and animals domesticated by humankind, over time a relatively small number became the subsistence mainstay of our species. Among the plants there figure about a dozen grasses and perhaps an equal number of rhizomes or tubers. The grasses include wheat, barley, oats, rye, maize, rice, quinoa, the millets, and perhaps buckwheat. The tubers would include manioc (cassava), yams, taro, sweet potatoes, and potatoes. Around this baker's dozen of plants, most of the big important agrarian societies in all of world history built their food supplies. Naturally, these were local systems: rice, sweet potatoes and taro in Asia (though of course not only those); maize, potatoes, sweet potatoes and manioc in the New World; some millets and wheat in the Middle East; and so on.

Legume

Everywhere that one finds these grasses and rhizomes, plants with lots of "starch" in them -- the so-called "complex carbohydrates" -- one also finds one or more legumes to keep them company. The legumes or pulses are rich in protein: peas, beans, peanuts or groundnuts, chickpeas, and lentils, among others. These foods "go with" starchy foods nutritively, in terms of taste, and even aesthetically. A Mexican tortilla goes with red beans. In the Caribbean islands today, red or black beans go with the rice. In Asia, soybeans or soybean extracts, such

as beancurd fresh, dried or fermented -- not to mention mung beans, black beans, fermented bean sauces and soy sauce, are important accompaniments to rice; in the Middle East, chickpeas commonly go with wheat, lentils with millet. Why a legume would always accompany a complex carbohydrate is not so easy to explain -- but Professor Lawrence Kaplan has written to suggest strongly that this was no accident(4) and Dr. H.T. Huang has provided an illuminating discussion in the case of the soybean (5).

Fringe

Finally, everywhere that people eat one or more legumes with one or more complex carbohydrates, they also have flavors for their food. Calling them "flavors" says too little. Audrey Richards tells us how the Bemba eat their core food with its customary fringe:

To the Bemba each meal, to be satisfactory, must be composed of two constituents: a thick porridge (ubwali) made of millet and the relish (umunani) of vegetables, meat or fish, which is eaten with it...Ubwali is commonly translated by "porridge" but this is misleading. The hot water and meal are mixed in proportion of 3 to 2 to make ubwali and this produces a solid mass of the consistency of plasticine and quite unlike what we know as porridge. Ubwali is eaten in hunks torn off in the hand, rolled into balls, dipped in relish, and bolted whole...

To the Bemba, millet porridge is not only necessary, but it is the only constituent of his diet which ranks as food...

But the native, while he declares he cannot live without ubwali, is equally emphatic that he cannot eat porridge without a relish (umunani), usually in the form of a liquid stew....

The term umunani is applied to stews -- meat, fish, caterpillars, locusts, ants, vegetables (wild and cultivated), mushrooms, etc. -- prepared to eat with porridge. The functions of the relish are two: first to make the ubwali easier to swallow, and second to give it taste....The Bemba himself explains that the sauce is not food....Meat and vegetable stews are cooked with salt whenever possible, and there is no doubt that an additional function of the relish in native eyes is to give the porridge taste and to lessen the monotony of the diet (Richards 1939:46-9).
(3)

What Richards calls "relish," I call fringe. Every cuisine has it; it may be more important in the diets of peoples who eat large quantities of complex carbohydrate, because it "helps the food go down." The fringe differs in many ways from the carbohydrate or basic starchy food. Remember that I am trying to identify a pattern, meaning that the particular food in each category is not so important as the category it stands for -- that the items eaten are in systematic relations to each other. Of course that's not how the eaters think -- they are interested in eating, not in some dumb observer's devices for explaining things to himself. But for the pattern I am trying to sketch, Chinese rice and Russian black bread are interchangeable. The pattern consists of "slots" or categories, into which different things can be put, in place of each other.

"CFLP in practice"

Here are three imaginary different meals. In the first, a broth or soup is made, using various fringe elements as well as one or more legumes. Into the soup at serving is ladled a substantial quantity of a precooked starchy meal or flour, in order to make a kind of soupy stew or porridge. The dish is then eaten with a spoon. In the second cuisine, some kind of bread is

baked or otherwise cooked from the flour of a cereal. Once it is baked, there is inserted into it -- as if it were an envelope, a sheath, or other container -- a quantity of fringe foods and legumes. The resulting dish, rather like a large sandwich, can be eaten with one's hands.

In the third case, a thick porridge or gruel is made from the rhizome of a starchy vegetative plant. It is then sprinkled with, or has stirred into it, additional foods, probably including some fringe elements; a legume may also be added, or it may be eaten separately instead. This flavored gruel is then folded within an inedible leaf container, and in this form may be boiled, steamed or baked. It is unwrapped to be eaten. As I hope will be grasped immediately, the appearance of these principal dishes varies greatly; but their composition, as illustrative of the tripartite structural principle I am suggesting, can be similar. In other examples we could transform the core into noodles or dumplings, and the legume into fillings or sauces.

The core, a "starch," might be potatoes or maize, sweet potatoes or barley, yams or oats -- that is, either a cereal or a tuber. From such ingredients may be made gruels or porridges, breads, dumplings, or some sort of noodle. The legume will vary similarly. In Latin America, it is commonly the lima, runner, red or black bean; in Southeast Asia, the soybean or mung bean; in Southwest Asia, the chickpea or lentil; and so on. The fringe, because it covers "everything else," is harder to describe. But the difference between core and fringe seems to be enshrined in the language itself, and in the way food is eaten. That a Chinese banquet has no rice is, among other things, a way of declaring that it is a banquet. That the proportion of fringe to core increases on ritual occasions is a way of saying it is a ritual occasion. That core without fringe would be tedious most of the time is amply understood; anyone, even very hungry, who has tried to down a bowl of pasta without olive oil, garlic, salt, cheese, pepper or anything else knows it. That fringe alone, without core, would be "rich" -- or even slightly nauseating -- is also well understood. The formal distinctions which follow should not blind us to the fact that such differences are a living part of the way the world of food is organized for people in most societies.

Another striking difference, here contrasting only fringe and core, is likely to be texture: the core is always cooked, and always relatively soft and chewy (bread, rice, potatoes, tortillas, couscous, bulgur, boiled and mashed yams, hominy grits, taro or green bananas, manioc "bread," cornmeal, sorghum "mealies," kasha, etc.)

But the real difference is taste: the fringe always has "more taste" than the core; the core "tastes better" with fringe; the fringe "helps" one eat more core; the fringe by itself (like the core by itself, except under special ritual conditions) is less appetizing than the two together.

Whereas I think that legumes have proved nutritively and culinarily significant in every world area with a stable agriculture, all important complex carbohydrates -- rice, say, or wheat -- stand in aesthetic contrast to the legumes and fringe foods, whether by color, texture, taste, nutritive value or -- commonly enough -- all four.

The Demise of CFLP: Fats & Sugars

I hope you will see that I am seeking to build a device for comparison, in which vegetable protein, in contradistinction to animal protein, plays a particular part. A classification this simple cannot serve to describe cuisines -- that is not its purpose. But perhaps it can serve to make major cuisines comparable at a simple level. It has certain nutritional implications -- but again, only of the simplest sort. It has historical implications, too, because it is based on the idea that certain parallels in cuisine emerged after the mastery of agriculture.

A few hundred years ago, the ancient and widespread center-fringe-legume pattern began to crumble. This happened first in western Europe. Its deterioration came at roughly the same time as the Industrial Revolution. I think that this may not have been a coincidence. During the ensuing two centuries, the CFLP has decayed at ever-faster rates, over more and more of the earth's surface, hastened by large-scale migration, war and conquest, and a vastly improved technology of agriculture, animal husbandry, transportation and communication. The main alternative foods, which have served to hasten the destruction of the ancient CFLP itself, fall into two principal categories. At different times and in different ways, both have been affiliated culinarily with the core foods, but as minor parts of the fringe -- prized, yet too scarce to be eaten often or in large quantities. Yet I am increasingly convinced that they did not become more important ingredients of world diet merely as arithmetically increasing fractions of the total caloric intake of world populations, making the core "more nutritious." Instead, I believe that they gradually altered the nature of the core itself -- its relation to other foods. Increases in worldwide consumption of these foods also meant basic changes in world energy use.

One of these two food categories consists of fats -- animal fats such as lard and butter, and non-animal (seed, nut and vegetable) oils, such as corn (maize), palm, cottonseed, sesame, rapeseed, peanut (groundnut), and safflower oil. There are of course great differences between these two sorts of fats, "animal" and "vegetable," both in terms of their nutritive and health meanings for humans, and in terms of the nature and economy of their production. I put them together here only for the present argument.

The other such alternative food category consists of sugars -- but so-called "processed sugars," such as sucrose from cane, and dextrose and fructose from maize, rather than naturally occurring sugars in fruits and vegetables. Both fats and sugars, including processed sugars, are "natural," by which is meant here only that they can be extracted without alteration. Cane sugar (sucrose) is extracted from the sugar beet or sugar cane or sugar palm, just as cottonseed oil is extracted from cottonseed, palm oil from the oil palm, and so on. (The extraction and processing of animal fats raises special problems, which cannot be addressed here.)

Together, fats and sugars -- both in the ways that they are made, and in the ways that they are conceived and combined-- have modified in some ways our human relationship to nature, while playing a special role in the remaking of the food habits of the entire world. That remaking, however, has been uneven and, as noted earlier, it happened first in the West, particularly in Western Europe. It happened next in the European (or "white") colonies or erstwhile colonies-- such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Argentina, South Africa, etc. It has now begun to happen in much of the world at large, including the old colonial areas of the West (such as Africa, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia), and in what once was called the socialist world. This massive change, whereby sugars and fats have gradually begun to replace the complex carbohydrates of the center, and thereby to erode the structure of the meal itself, might be called a "second revolution." If the first revolution was domestication, perfected a dozen thousand years ago, then the second revolution is now less than five centuries old.

Conclusion

It seems to me that the way CFLP eaters become big consumers of fats and sugars is not some single, undifferentiated vector, but a number of different ongoing processes, some still poorly understood, that I have lumped together here under one messy term. Our understanding of

how food habits change, both historically and at the present time, remains incomplete. Hardly anywhere, apparently, is the value of a change from one way of eating to another carefully weighed or questioned by consumers, who often seem to be "thinking about something else" besides eating and drinking, when they are learning to consume a new product.

And yet I think that the last few centuries have witnessed a significant change away from an ancient and quite widespread patterning of food intake, and that we are only dimly aware of how that change occurred, or the principal motor forces behind it. I am anxious to underline the highly speculative character of my comments here. What I have offered you is a scenario of the past, but a scenario that must remain largely imaginary, until I have enough reasonable evidence to realize I am wrong or to guess more loudly that I am right, in the way I have read food history.

Footnote (1)

The arguments in this summary are treated more fully in Mintz 1992 and Mintz 1994, and in Mintz and Schlettwein-Gsell, 2001. (see below)

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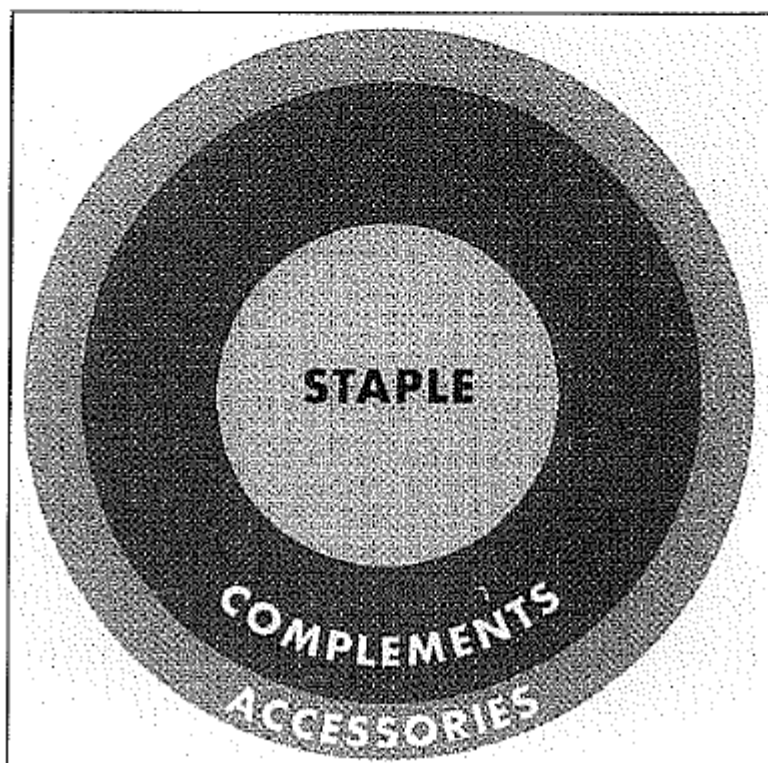
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Figure 1. The structure of food habits. Food items are assembled in a circle as three major groups assigning them different degrees of importance according to the role they play in the construction of a dish and/or meals, irrespective of their nutrient value. Staples play a central role, with complementary and accessory foods playing secondary and tertiary roles, respectively.

STAPLE: Potatoes, wheat, rice

COMPLEMENTS: meat/fish/eggs, milk/cheese, vegetables, legumes

ACCESSORIES: Fats, spices, nuts, sweets, fruits, drinks.



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von Eva Barlösius - 1999 - Food - 256 Seiten

6.1 Das „*Core-Fringe-Leguminous-Model*“ (CFLM) Obwohl alle Küchen von sich behaupten, sich grundsätzlich von anderen abzuheben, existieren trotzdem ...

books.google.de/books?isbn=3779914646..

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<http://www.lateinamerika-studien.at/content/geschichtepolitik/mais/mais-77.html>

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oder gebacken (*Mintz 1992*, 17-18). Core (Kern). Fringe und Leguminosen. Periphere Beigaben. Fringe = schmackhaft aromatische Geschmackslieferanten ...

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