

Introduction

I repeat: the pepper, if you please; for if it had not been for peppercorns, then what is ending now in East and West might never have begun. Pepper it was that brought Vasco da Gama's tall ships across the ocean, from Lisbon's Tower of Belem to the Malabar Coast: first to Calicut and later, for its lagoony harbour, to Cochin. English and French sailed in the wake of that first-arrived Portugee, so that in the period called Discovery-of-India—but how could we be discovered when we were not covered before?—we were “not so much sub-continent as sub-condiment,” as my distinguished mother had it. “From the beginning, what the world wanted from bloody mother India was daylight-clear,” she'd say. “They came for the hot stuff, just like any man calling on a tart.”

—SALMAN RUSHDIE, *The Moor's Last Sigh*

The question is no longer one of knowing if it is “good” to eat the other or if the other is “good” to eat, nor of knowing which other. One eats him regardless and lets oneself be eaten by him. The so-called non-anthropophagic cultures practice symbolic anthropophagy and even construct their most elevated socius, indeed the sublimity of their morality, their politics, and their right, on this anthropophagy. . . . The moral question is thus not, nor has it ever been: should one eat or not eat, eat this and not that, the living or the nonliving, man or animal, but since *one* must eat in any case and since it is and tastes good to eat, and since there's no other definition of the good [*du bien*], how for goodness sake should one *eat well* [*bien manger*]? And what does this imply? What is eating? How is this metonymy of intro-

jection to be regulated? And in what respect does the formulation of these questions in language give us still more food for thought? In what respect is the question, if you will, carnivorous?

—JACQUES DERRIDA, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida”

Men who come out here should have no entrails.

—JOSEPH CONRAD, *Heart of Darkness*

Hunger

As a child in India I tended to dream of what I considered to be British food. Improbable as it seems now, I dreamed of potted meats (especially Spam), tinned tongue, jam tarts, ginger beer, pork-pies, and éclairs. I dreamed of gastronomic surprises nestled in tuck boxes and hampers of food, poised to reveal their bounty in the midnight feasts I read about but never experienced in my own life. I longed especially for the singular delectation of eating my food out of a tin—to me the very sign of gastronomic avant-gardism, situated as I was in a global backwater and largely innocent of what I was to learn later were called “industrial foods.”¹ My mother’s vision of the British table, however, did not accord with mine. When I asked her, at seven or eight, what sahibs (for me as well as for others a shorthand for white, usually British people) ate, she said, “They take a hunk of meat, put salt and pepper on it, and stick it in a hot oven. They boil potatoes and a head of cabbage. When everything is cooked through, they sit down to eat. This is what I have read.” Despite a childhood and adolescence spent in colonial India, she had only a textual knowledge of the alimentary habits and rituals of the Anglo-Indians resident there—quite unsurprising, given the nonexistent social contacts, except at the very highest levels, between colonizer and colonized. Shocked and disbelieving—nothing in her description accorded with my sense of the rituals of cookery or even the character of food—I concluded that she had read the wrong sources.

My own sense of the delights of British cuisine was the result of reading the works of Enid Blyton, the best-selling children’s author in the world, notwithstanding her death in 1968, until the meteoric rise of J. K. Rowling. Read widely in Britain as well as in countries of the so-called Commonwealth, especially India, Pakistan, the Caribbean (as the evi-

dence of Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* suggests), Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, and (what was then) Rhodesia, these tales of children's adventures celebrated juvenile autonomy, comradeship, a breezy and self-assured Englishness, and the joys of eating often and abundantly. Written largely during the period of wartime and postwar rationing in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s, the books invariably featured rhapsodic descriptions of glorious feasts, usually eaten in farmhouses, in the outdoors, or in boarding-school dormitories after lights were out. The primary involvement of Blyton's juvenile characters with the world was salivary, or so it seemed. The books made me salivate too, especially because the foods they lovingly blazoned seemed as desirable and unattainable as the adventures the characters casually attracted; even biscuits and hard-boiled eggs, which we consumed routinely in the postcolony, appeared on the page to be infused with an exoticism quite novel to me. Much later, in my teens, a reading of E. M. Forster's acerbic summary of the mock-English menu at the Anglo-Indian club of Chandrapore—"Julienne soup full of bullety bottled peas, pseudo-cottage bread, fish full of branching bones, pretending to be plaice, more bottled peas with the cutlets, trifles, sardines on toast: the menu of Anglo-India. A dish might be added or subtracted as one rose or fell in the official scale, the peas might rattle less or more, the sardines and the vermouth be imported by a different firm, but the tradition remained; the food of exiles, cooked by servants who did not understand it"—sealed my sense of the impassable gulf between proper British cuisine and the Indian context.² But it also gave me a slightly different understanding from the one I had harbored earlier of the pleasures and investments of British cooking. The Anglo-Indians dreamed of British food too, it seems; their mistake lay in their literal-mindedness in translating their dreams of ingestion into the stuff of everyday life in a remote and unpromising colony. Now that Indian food is, in the early twenty-first century, the most popular food in Britain (at least where opinion polls about public dining are concerned), and chicken tikka masala the British national dish, the content of the food fantasies of westward-looking Indian children must be considerably unsettled.

In my own life, other revelations had occurred before my encounter with Forster's astringent gloss on the Anglo-Indian palate. My history classes had taught me about other, more consequential historical hungers, ones that looked east rather than west as I did; had it not been for pepper, as Rushdie notes in his witty conjoining of the events of 1492 and

1498 (the latter being the year of Vasco da Gama's arrival in Calicut on the Malabar coast), the world as we know it today might not have come to be.³ Medieval and early modern Europe, one learned, hungered for the spices of the subcontinent and of southeast Asia. Used in a variety of ways—for embalming, magical rituals, cooking, and preservation as well as in medications, aphrodisiacs, cosmetics, and perfumes—spices were endowed with considerable glamour and value, their possession and use being a mark of conspicuous consumption and of discriminating taste among European elites seeking to consolidate their claims to refinement. Indeed, Wolfgang Schivelbusch suggests that eastern spices were a stimulant to the imagination at least as much as they were a spur to elite modes of social competition. The taste for spices, he argues, implies “a peculiarly medieval longing for faraway places—the longing . . . for the Paradise they thought could be tasted in the spices. . . . Something of this notion survives in the censer-swinging of the Catholic mass.”⁴ This gustatory fantasy, Schivelbusch postulates, was the engine that made Europe what it is today, launching it from medievalism to modernity through its long sea voyages and subsequent colonial conquests. For over three centuries the lucrative European spice trade with the East was dependent upon land routes across Asia and the Middle East and upon numerous intermediaries, primarily Arab and Venetian. But by the sixteenth century improvements in navigational techniques had led the other European powers to seek the fabled spices directly. Sea captains like Ferdinand Magellan and Vasco da Gama were instrumental in opening up the sea routes to the East and ensuring Portuguese monopoly over the spice (primarily pepper) trade until other European powers decided to challenge its hegemony. The Dutch were the first to break the Portuguese monopoly and to replace it in the Moluccas with a near monopoly of their own. This they enforced with ruthless brutality for two centuries, garnering profits from the clove trade not just with Europe but also with other parts of Asia, notably northern India.⁵

The Dutch were in turn challenged, though unsuccessfully, by the British East India Company, established by a royal charter from Elizabeth I on 31 December 1600. The arrival of the East India Company in India was not planned; it was, rather, the consequence of bungling. The Company's ships arrived at the western port of Surat in India in 1608 only after failing to make significant progress against their Dutch rivals in the Moluccas. Over the course of the next century, however, the Company's agents made

considerable headway against their Portuguese rivals in the subcontinent. Their own trade there was in textiles, indigo, saltpeter, and tea, though they made inroads into the Dutch monopoly of the spice trade in the Moluccas as well.⁶ But by the mid-eighteenth century, when the East India Company had begun to establish its paramountcy in the subcontinent, subduing its French rivals as well as numerous Indian rulers, the European taste for spices that had driven the race to the East was in decline, being replaced by a taste for coffee, tea, opium, and sugar (the last item was classified with spices in the European Middle Ages). Yet spices held on to their value in another register. As Timothy Morton notes, spices retained their status as fantasy objects and as ideologically charged substances long after their economic value had declined.⁷ The commercial and fantasmatic traffic in spices is an early modern historical lesson in the magical realism that forms the idiom of colonial hunger. Rushdie instantiates this beautifully in *The Moor's Last Sigh* through the code switching that allows the lost Moorish paradise of Al-Andalus to dissolve into the newly discovered spice groves of European fable.

British interest in the subcontinent shifted to other, more profitable commodities. The most successful of these ventures was the Company's cultivation of opium as a monopoly crop in the subcontinent. Carl A. Trocki and James Hevia suggest that opium should be accorded the status as "one of the most empire-friendly commodities circulating in the global economy."⁸ The work of Sidney Mintz in the Caribbean has persuasively established the importance of the global commodification of sugar for thinking about connections among the Atlantic slave trade, plantation economies in the Americas, proto-industrial forms of production, the tempo of the working day in the factory, and new patterns of mass consumption (and consumer boycotts).⁹ The significance of opium to the East India Company in particular and to the empire in general belongs to a similar anthropology and history of world systems, far exceeding what might appear to be the parochial contexts of British opium smuggling into China and the resulting Opium Wars of the nineteenth century. "Without opium the British global empire is virtually unthinkable," notes Hevia, reviewing the work of Trocki. "By the early part of the nineteenth century, British Indian opium had stanching the flow of New World silver into China, replacing silver as the commodity that could be exchanged for Chinese tea and other goods. By the 1830s, silver was flowing out of China to India and beyond. . . . Opium revenues in India

not only kept the colonial administration afloat, but sent vast quantities of silver bullion back to Britain. The upshot was the global dominance of the British pound sterling until World War I.”¹⁰

The extraordinary scale and importance of this traffic have led Hevia to describe the British empire as itself a figure of addiction, one whose character is to be understood in terms of its “drug dependency.”¹¹ An arresting figuration of global-colonial capitalism—a figuration that calls to mind Karl Marx’s more famous formulation about vampire capitalism in *Capital*—drug addiction places the empire tropologically not so much in the standard neoclassical economic languages of efficiencies of scale, good bookkeeping, and responsible work practices that have been used to explain British colonial success as in an appetitive and phantasmal one, underlining the nonutilitarian, debilitating, and uncontrollable cravings it simultaneously incites and exploits. Trocki’s term for the opium-driven empire is “drug cartel”; while gesturing toward a corporate logic of exploitation rather than toward a medicalized and moral one of pathology, the term does not altogether abolish the frisson engendered by the strange figure of the addict. Rather, it absorbs the addict into the larger figure of parasitism, of unhealthy feeding, that Marx accentuates in his critique of the vampiric form of nineteenth-century political economy, including a colonial political economy.¹² Addicted to addiction itself, the character of colonial hunger, in this formulation, calls for what Avital Ronell has called a “narcoanalysis,” one that would register the wild, fabulous character of its appetites.¹³

Arguably such a narcoanalysis could also be brought to bear upon the empire’s more salubrious and health-giving commodity, tea, given its vectoring through opium smuggling in the nineteenth century—just as sugar in an earlier period was yoked to the economy of Caribbean slave production. But if there was a noteworthy appreciation in Britain in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth of the moral and sometimes even bodily taint of “blood sugar,” there was little corresponding indignation about tea after the eighteenth century, and the commodity chain that linked sugar, opium, and tea was not one that drew particular remark.¹⁴ Ironically enough, tea production in Indian plantations, established from the 1830s on to compete with Chinese tea, took off on the world market just as Britain won trading concessions as a result of the Opium Wars. Less surprisingly, these plantations borrowed forms of coercive labor, corporal punishment, and legal exceptionalism from the sugar and cotton plantations of the Americas.¹⁵

Feeding

As all these instances of the psychopharmacopoeia of empire—spices, opium, sugar, and tea—demonstrate, colonialism was in important respects a reconfiguration of the fantasmatic landscapes and the sensorium of colonizer and colonized, generating new experiences of desire, taste, disgust, and appetite and new technologies of the embodied self. Such a reconfiguration comprised a crucial part of what Gayatri Spivak has denominated, adapting Martin Heidegger, the “worlding” of the (now Third) world in terms of the subject-constituting imperative of nineteenth-century colonialism. For her this imperative is to be understood as “soul making,” or “the imperialist project cathected as civil society-through-social-mission.” For Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, and for all those who were willing to shoulder the white man’s—or, in Jane’s case, the white woman’s—burden, this involved the monumental but necessary task of transforming “the heathen into a human so that he [could] be treated as an end in himself.”¹⁶

Details both grand and vulgar of colonial history make it eminently clear that the projects of epistemic overhaul involved in making heathens human occurred in several registers concurrently. For one thing, they were irreducibly somaticized; souls in the making were more often than not incarnated in bodies whose appetites, expressions, and comings and goings had to be rigorously fashioned. Soul making and body shaping, physiology and epistemology were intimately conjugated. The body was both a figurative reservoir, generating tropes of encounter—such as cannibalism or even caste—with abandon, and the materialist locus of transformation. Colonial politics often spoke in an indisputably visceral tongue: its experiments, engagements, and traumas were experienced in the mouth, belly, olfactory organs, and nerve endings, so that the stomach served as a kind of somatic political unconscious in which the phantasmagoria of colonialism came to be embodied. “Men who come out here should have no entrails,” remarks the manager of the Central Station in *Heart of Darkness*, in a telling comment on the enteric manifestation of empire’s troubles. This alimentary habitus, one that included not just the mouth but also skin, sinew, and gut, was the banal yet crisis-ridden theater for staging questions central to encounter and rule, questions of proximity, cathexis, consumption, incorporation, digestion, commensality, and purgation. As the very title of David Arnold’s study of imperial medicine, *Colonizing the Body*, suggests, the body of the colonized subject

was the fecund and hotly contested terrain of soul making, with medicine, hygiene, diet, evacuation, vestments, exercise, sex, and childbirth serving as the major vectors of remaking and self-fashioning.¹⁷

In many ways the shock of encounter with colonialism manifested itself very signally in the production of new forms of appetite, new notions of health and hygiene, and new modes of disgust. Thus one might note that while Western forms of scientific and humanistic learning and English literary instruction passed without comment and, indeed, were welcomed with eagerness by the Bengali Hindu *bhadralok* of the nineteenth century, these very subjects were dismayed by the departures from culinary and commensal orthopraxy practiced by some of the students of this new knowledge.¹⁸ The orthodox Bengali Brahmin scholar Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, a critic of the imitative ways of westernized Indians, noted with disgust the conduct of his fellow students at Hindu College in Calcutta in the 1840s: “Open defiance of Hindu social conventions in matters of food and drink was then considered almost *de rigueur* [sic] by the *avant garde* students of the College. To be reckoned a civilized person, one had to eat beef and consume alcohol.”¹⁹ An acute cultural physiognomist, Bhudev recognized that to be in the vanguard of an order of colonial modernity—to be “*avant garde*,” in his terms—involved not just a new freedom from orthodoxy but a new orthodoxy of taste and disgust, now “almost *de rigueur*,” to replace older Brahminical ones. It also involved a certain stylization of the relationship between interiority and a public persona; eating, as well as not eating, became part of a novel, aggressively visible political theater.

Clearly Bhudev felt himself classed among the backward ones, those who were failing to pass the test of historically appropriate embodiment. This was an important consideration in a period that, under the pressure of colonialism, saw the induction of new norms of corporeal propriety and normality. Palate, sinew, and stomach came to assume a certain historical charge through featuring prominently in debates about the forms of colonial modernity in the subcontinent. Henceforth alimentation would be an indispensable element in thinking about the forms of colonial, anticolonial, and nationalist virtue—and not only for *bhadralok* males being drawn inexorably into the circle of westernization. The fact that the Indian Mutiny of 1857 is popularly believed to have originated in the introduction in the Native Infantry regiments of the British Indian army of greased cartridges for the new Enfield rifles, cartridges that were rumored to be, and in fact may have been, coated with beef tallow and

pork fat—offensive to the religious sensibilities of both Hindu and Muslim sepoys (infantry soldiers)—makes clear the degree to which Bhudev's terrors about alimentary outrages against caste and religious integrity were shared by several sectors of the colonized population and not confined to its elite or westernized constituencies. For many kinds of subjects of colonialism, including upper-caste bhadrakalok men, high-caste but economically vulnerable sepoys, aspiring nationalist males, women seeking orthodox sanction for unorthodox forms of public and professional life, diet was configured from the nineteenth century on as a terrain for encounter, challenge, transformation, and consolidation. It was the ground on which the constitutive terms, limits, and concrete possibilities of a modern colonial order came to be assimilated and sometimes repudiated. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's public turn to vegetarianism in his early manhood in Britain, for instance, was much more than conformity to a familial and regional vegetarian tradition: it was carefully chosen and symbolically freighted. A pragmatic contrivance at the outset to win passage out of provincial existence—his mother would not permit him to leave Gujarat for England unless he vowed to remain faithful to vegetarianism—it came to be converted in short order into a more elevated thinking about the sacrifice necessary to triumph over the relentlessly consumptive, even parasitic, order represented for him by colonial modernity.

Indians responded to what seemed to be a new prescription to consume in a number of ways. Some, like the Young Bengal rebels castigated by Bhudev, turned with gusto from an antiquated alimentary regime conspicuous for its prohibitions on consumption and commensality. Others of bhadrakalok origin sought to remake colonized masculine subjects into properly nationalist ones through modes of somatic and psychic self-cultivation.²⁰ Still others, much lower on the social hierarchy and not particularized with proper names, capitalized on the new world order emerging in 1857 in order to mock Brahminical rules of caste purity and caste hierarchy. The low-caste *khalasi* (worker) who, in one of the stock tales about the start of the Mutiny, gleefully reported the news of the greased cartridges to the high-caste sepoy surely was one of them (see chapter 1).

For others yet, the response to the alimentary challenge inaugurated by colonialism assumed a different bodily investment, one that can be described as sacrificial and ascetic and more uneasily as nationalist. The twelve-year-old Bhudev, newly admitted to Hindu College, was bound by

a vow to his father to avoid all prohibited food and drink. It was a vow to which he was zealously faithful. As in the case of Gandhi, the vow as a long-established form of moral regulation takes on added resonance in the new sensory worlds opened up by colonialism. The exceptionalism of the achievement of Anandibai Joshi, the first Hindu woman physician to receive a medical degree in the West, went hand in hand with, indeed was guaranteed by, her vow to adhere to dietary and vestimentary propriety during her sojourn at the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania. "I will go as a Hindu and come back to live as a Hindu," she famously declared in her address at the Serampore College Hall on the eve of her departure for New York. Dying early of a tuberculosis apparently strained or even precipitated by cold winters and dietary restrictions, she was to achieve fame not so much through professional achievement—she did take her degree but died before assuming her post at the Albert Edward Hospital in Kolhapur—as through the aberrant contours of the brief life she led. For the Christian missionaries who had supported her ambition and eagerly expected her conversion, there was more than a trace of bafflement at her willed sacrifice of her body as a recalcitrant, morbid tribute to antiquated habits. To a Hindu orthodoxy in India, on the other hand, it was precisely these putative perversities of diet and dress, manifestations of a patriotism and homesickness that had produced an alimentary heroism unto death, that were to be celebrated; especially in the case of women, passing the test of suitable embodiment could entail abnegating life itself when required.²¹

As the examples above demonstrate, an alimentary investment for the (caste-privileged) body poised precariously between colonialism and nationalism could be quite complex. Conceived above all as a principle of asceticism, this investment sets itself against what it sees as the insatiable feeding of the West, even as it acknowledges that such renunciation might militate against a colonially inflected and even an empirically verifiable sense of somatic fitness. In this it affirms an alimentary ethics that seeks a more expansive definition of fitness, something more than, and something that might be in opposition to, a bodily health measured by strength and efficiency. At the same time, though, at least for Gandhi and Anandibai, such renunciations are very much oriented toward a West marked by carnivory and other forms of alimentary voracity.²² Vows of alimentary abstinence make possible the passage into the West in the first place; they are recontextualized and brought to a pitch of moral perfection by being practiced there, outside of and alienated from their

putatively proper contexts. Dietary belonging is no longer tied to a place or context but becomes part of the portable apparatus of embodied practice that actually has the greatest effect by being set adrift in the world. Diaspora (usually in the West), as the arena of temptation, testing, and sacrifice, is in many ways the most appropriate theater for the turn, or return, to practices of dietary belonging and dietary fidelity. If diaspora features largely in three of the four chapters in this book, it is precisely because of its favored place in an alimentary discourse engaged with the always vexed questions of interiority, belonging, and alienness and with the entailments of dining with strangers.

Body talk about colonialism has tended to focus, perhaps understandably, on the bodies of the colonized and on the coercive and subtle modes through which their phenomenological existence came to be understood and often reconstellated in the new world order of colonialism. But, as increasing numbers of studies of Englishmen and Englishwomen in the tropics have come to show, colonizers themselves were not immune from the embodied obligations of biopower, which surely has something of a relationship with soul making, even though the two are far from identical. For them, as much as for the colonized, politics in the colony could not help but be a bodied, carnal politics; carnality, including alimentation, was an important theater for the soul making of Indians as well as for the self-making of Anglo-Indians.

What, however, constitutes food and ingestion or eating, especially in the colony? What substances can be considered necessities in the sense of meeting a biomoral minimum of ingestibility? and for whom? Which ones are considered natural to eat? What forms of violence are involved in ingesting them? and what are their somatic effects? And what or who is assimilated in the process of procuring, cooking, sharing, and ingesting them? As Claude Lévi-Strauss and others after him have emphatically recognized, cooking has the contours of a language, with gustemes that correspond analogically with the phonemes that organize linguistic meaning. As in the case of language, which mocks the notion of private property, there can be no eating or digestion that is strictly one's own.²³ Besides, as Lévi-Strauss suggests in "The Culinary Triangle," cooking, however defined, is universally a means by which nature becomes culture and categories of cooking are always apt symbols for social differentiation. Hence foods and totemic species are "goods to think with" rather than only "goods to eat," as Edmund Leach observes in his reading of Lévi-Strauss.²⁴ To feed, as Derrida implies in the above epigraph, is invari-

ably to be inserted into relationship, a relationship with an other, though not always or necessarily a human one.

But what is one to think of the mutual feeding by and upon humans that for Derrida constitutes one's irreducible communication with the other? It is not reducible, for one thing, only to the parasitic ingestive order that is commonly used to describe the operations of colonialism, as for instance in the narcopolitics of opium. Neither is it the same as the vampirism Marx invokes as a figure of monstrous gastronomy, of voraciousness without limit. In the literature on vampirism, vamping is by definition destructive absorption in the service of cloning oneself, Diana Fuss noting that vampirism is "both other-incorporating and self-reproducing."²⁵ In such a scene of ingestion, one assimilates the other totally to reproduce oneself without being altered or disturbed in any degree by this consumption; the other loses its character of otherness, if it can be said ever to have possessed it, in this process. Consumption never displaces or confuses self-reproduction but simply and straightforwardly supplements it. Thus, in his well-known reading of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Christopher Craft calls attention to the indistinguishability between the Count and the other vampires in the novel, those whom he has vamped in order to recreate them in his image: "[We] must remember that the vampire mouth is first of all Dracula's mouth, and that all subsequent versions of it . . . merely repeat as diminished simulacra the desire of the Great Original, that 'father or furtherer of a new order of beings.' . . . Dracula himself, calling his children 'my jackals to do my bidding when I want to feed,' identifies the systematic creation of female surrogates who enact his will and desire."²⁶ As an eating without digesting, a consumption without remainder and without conflict, vampirism encompasses a single, self-sufficient end of the alimentary tract. It is an instance of what Derrida has named an exemplary orality, or "exemplorality," the process by which a (fantasmatic) mouth "transforms everything into auto-affection, assimilates everything to itself by idealizing it with interiority, masters everything by mourning its passing, refusing to touch it, to digest it naturally, but digests it ideally, consumes what it does not consume and *vice versa*."²⁷

Cannibalism has often been conflated with vampirism and imagined therefore as an ingestion of the other that results in undisturbed replication. To be sure, it has functioned variously for many thinkers from at least the early modern period on, sometimes as an emblem of appetite carried to its unbearable logical and ethical limit and just as often, but not

necessarily contrarily, as an emblem of unassimilable civilizational otherness.²⁸ The crude ideological function of the latter reading is perhaps all too demonstrable: thinking of Amerindian societies as irremediably committed to the consumption of human flesh permitted their enslavement and even extermination by their European colonizers. Geoffrey Sanborn notes the way the description of an appetitive, unbridled cannibalism came generally to be accompanied by the expression of a (normatively European) “humane” horror. Cannibalism thus came to be opposed to and therefore constitutive of humanity as such: if to be human, and humane, was to be of the party that loved humanity, it was also consequently to disavow the possibility of love for those humans who ate other humans.²⁹ For those who avowed the existence in certain parts of the world of a cannibalism practiced by social sanction, rather than a situational cannibalism resulting from extremity of circumstance, this humanity came to have an emphatically racialized character. The popular tales of shipwreck cannibalism among European crews in the first half of the nineteenth century consequently distinguished between “the reprehensible desire of dark-skinned beings and the piteous need of whites.”³⁰ Even for those who dismissed the possibility of cannibalism outside the context of famine, and therefore of the existence of the cannibal *qua* cannibal, the rhetorical figure of cannibal consumption was immensely productive for its capacity to stage a certain imaginative and ethical limit. Even for those authors who came to locate cannibalism within Europe itself, the act lost little of its character of civilizational otherness in this relocation, being used, for instance, in Britain at the end of the eighteenth century to highlight the differences between British moderation and French barbarousness.³¹ Edmund Burke’s turn to the rhetoric of cannibal appetites to describe the predations of the revolutionaries in France served as the most apt figuration of the event as moral extremity.³²

A resonant concept-metaphor with a long history in the production of colonial difference and racial and sexual panic, cannibalism has also featured more counterintuitively in another strain of cultural critique, now centuries old. This has tended to invert the terms of the commonsensical racial-civilizational logic of cannibalism, emphasizing among other things what Alan Bewell has termed “imperial *geophagy*” rather than anthropophagy.³³ Cannibalism comes in this inversion to be not the consumption of human flesh but asymmetrical extraction and exploitation. This permits the Jonathan Swift of “A Modest Proposal” to satirize English maltreatment of the Irish, and the Joseph Conrad of *Heart of*

Darkness to portray the cannibalism of a Kurtz, a cannibalism that is an ironic supplement to an oratory both disembodied and lofty and a contrast to the self-restraint of the cannibal crew of the *Nellie*. In such a reading cannibal culture is now the peculiar property and the continuing patrimony of a West that has produced slavery, colonialism, and capitalism and their forms of rapacious consumerism.³⁴

In the instances cited above, the identity of the cannibal might change, attaching itself variously to colonized or colonizing subjects, but the meaning of cannibalism itself remains more or less axiomatic and uninterrupted. For Derrida, on the other hand, anthropophagy has quite another resonance, one involving a form of incorporation of the other that is not reducible only to the violent reproduction of sameness. In this he follows in the wake of those like Michel de Montaigne and Sigmund Freud, for whom anthropophagy has functioned less as an abomination than as a parabolic instantiation of unexpected somatic and ethical engagement with the other. For Freud the mythic narrative of the primal horde that engages in cannibalism is an explanation of the origin of civilization and the emergence of a social contract among males through the deferred incorporation of the father's prohibitions. Anthropophagy becomes for him a figure of the idealization, incorporation, and mourning of and for the other that founds community.³⁵ As such, anthropophagy functions quite as effectively, Derrida suggests (though without specific recourse to Freud), as a rendition of the ethical and affective organization of nominally nonanthropophagous communities as of anthropophagous ones. The question is not whether one should ingest the other but how this should be done, since all feeding involves humans in economies of hospitality of a sort, of giving to and receiving from the other, of the interiorization of the other as well as a submission to incorporation by the other; that is what "eating well" is. It follows that the refusal to partake with or of the other is an important breakdown in or rejection of ethical reciprocity with the other.

Aversion

Such communion, which involves both a partaking with others and a transubstantiation of food or rather trope into flesh, is more often than not a vexed affair. In fact, communities are perhaps as frequently built on principles of distaste, distance, and avoidance as on taste and consumption; there is a primordial violence that inaugurates group bonds. Cath-

erine Gallagher's analysis of the place of the potato in late eighteenth-century political economic discourse and in the bread riots of hungry English working folk considers one instance of the modes of rejection that are generative of community. She notes that E. P. Thompson's assumption, in his famous essay on the clash between an extant moral economy and an emerging cash nexus, about "the reasonableness of popular action and its conformity to an implied human norm" leads him to overlook the place of the potato and its status as a "limit food" or nonfood in the representation of food, hunger, entitlement, and grievance. Reintroducing the potato into the alimentary economy of the rioters gives a somewhat different inflection to their actions. Reacting as much against the possibility of having to turn to the potato, the freely available food of the Irish peasantry, as they were avowing and maintaining the "bread nexus" of long institutional and social standing in England, English workers demonstrated their aversion to Irish modes of consumption even as they rejected a further proletarianization of their own condition.³⁶

In the subcontinent, as we shall see in chapter 1, Anglo-Indians were similarly, if somewhat less excusably, anxious to draw a *cordon sanitaire* between their own pristine bodies and local practices of feeding and digestion. But in some cases alimentary mingling and even dependence were unavoidable. The most striking case was that of the Indian wet nurse, routinely hired to nurse white infants in a nineteenth-century context in which metropolitan middle-class norms of outsourcing infant care and nourishment coincided with medical prohibitions against Anglo-Indian nursing in the colonies.³⁷ Anglo-Indian mothers were utterly dependent on these wet nurses for the health of their babies in a country in which they felt incapacitated by the "debilitating climate" and in which infant mortality was higher than in Britain. They were nonetheless often ambivalent about the "economy of the borrowed breast," as Sara Suleri has felicitously described it.³⁸ This ambivalence was generated not so much by the fact that the wet nurses, nursing mothers themselves, sometimes lost their own babies in order to nurture their Anglo-Indian charges; at least, this is rarely mentioned.³⁹ Occasionally, wet nurses were suspected of feeding opium to the infants in their care in order to pacify them. But even when such dangerous supplements to the breast were not suspected, there was a vexed character to maternal milk itself, Flora Annie Steel noting with some exasperation that "some Anglo-Indians feared that the milk of 'native women' might contaminate an English child's character."⁴⁰ The problem was generally not a lack of care but the all-

consuming nature of it, one that inducted the yet-unformed child into native languages, alien food habits, precocious sexual knowledge, and strong affective ties across the racial divide in ways that could not but subtract from his future Englishness. The *pharmakon* that was the wet nurse's milk thus had the potential to make a stranger of the English child, to disturb the genealogical transmission of identity.⁴¹ Notwithstanding its crucial role in physical sustenance, milk was an emphatically nonutilitarian, prosthetic food, incapable of being an entirely innocuous component of a colonial domestic economy. More than any other substance in the Anglo-Indian alimentary economy, it highlighted the lability involved in ingestion; for the vulnerable Anglo-Indian child, feeding, especially at the breast, was to put on a form of dangerous and ethically transformative knowledge, to be changed rather than simply fortified. Hence the familiar phenomenon of dispatching very young Anglo-Indian children, some as young as three, to native lands they had never seen, of which Rudyard Kipling writes with such pathos in "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep."⁴²

Anglo-Indian anxieties about the particulate, divisible, and racially unstable character of their somatic identity and about the biomoral substances that tended to recast it should make one rethink to some degree at least the received wisdom about the ingestive orders of the subcontinent. Generally speaking, the alimentary and digestive economy of the British who came to South Asia has always been considered to be worlds apart from the ones they encountered in the subcontinent. Indeed, the context of social dining was routinely posed as one exemplary instance of what kept rulers and subjects firmly segregated, orthodox Hindus and dietarily circumspect Muslims, who eschewed pork and alcohol, refusing the pollutions that dining with casteless, omnivorous, hard-drinking Europeans and Christians would entail. Indian men, both Hindu and Muslim, were marked by an economy of withholding, of a refusal of the homosocial traffic in food, here accorded the same status as the traffic in women—"We cannot dine with you and we cannot see your women, and therefore there can be no real friendship between us" was the charge commonly leveled by British men at Indian men—and therefore outside any kind of social or ethico-political economy.⁴³

Indeed, it was a commonplace in the colonial period, as it still is to a significant degree today, that ideas about food and the rules governing the ways in which it is handled and exchanged are formulated with extraordinary minuteness in a Brahminical Hindu culture of caste purity

and pollution.⁴⁴ The institution of caste, which traditionally has provided the grammar for such alimentary arrangements, has functioned in Indo-logical literature, from Max Mueller and Max Weber to Louis Dumont, as “the central problematic of Indian society,” incorporating and sometimes displacing related categories of identity and difference such as religion and class.⁴⁵ As the anthropologists Ronald Inden, Arjun Appadurai, Gloria Goodwin Raheja, Nicholas Dirks, and others have observed, this led to “a substantialized view of caste (reified as India’s essential institution) and an idealized view of Hinduism, regarded as the religious foundation of caste.”⁴⁶ Such an Indological fix on caste as the epistemological key to India’s otherness was inseparable from a British colonial policy that had, as early as the eighteenth century, pressed ancient Sanskrit texts of putative Hindu law into service for the governance of India by indigenous rather than foreign value-systems.⁴⁷

From the nineteenth century on, textual evidence of caste rules and practice came to be supplemented with ethnographic information, information that was inseparable from the logic of rule. Bernard Cohn notes, for instance, the interest in scrutability that undergirded colonial administrators’ firsthand compendia of caste organization: “In the first instance, a caste was a ‘thing,’ an entity, which was concrete and measurable; above all it had definable characteristics—endogamy, commensality rules, fixed occupation, common ritual practices. . . . This way of thinking about a particular caste was useful to the administrator, because it gave the illusion of knowing the people; he did not have to differentiate too much among individual Indians—a man was a Brahman, and Brahmans had certain characteristics. . . . India was seen as a collection of castes; the particular picture was different in any given time and place, but India was a sum of its parts and the parts were castes. . . . The ‘official’ census-based view of caste therefore saw the system as one of separate castes and their customs.”⁴⁸ This is undoubtedly too censorious a view of the instrumentalization that is an inescapable part of any production of knowledge. But it does underscore the drive toward the schematization and management of forms of otherness, including the other’s forms of knowability, that colonial rule generated; it clarifies what one scholar has called “the effective governmentalization of the colonial state by means of caste.”⁴⁹ This schematization led, as Raheja notes, to a view of castes as “isolable communities with their own customs, histories, and marriage rules” rather than as entities bound in mutual, if unequal, interrelationship.⁵⁰ Such a view of caste as uncontested and unchanging could not easily

accommodate any sense of the historicity of caste or indeed the considerable histories of *dalit* (untouchable) and non-Brahmin critique, mobilization, and struggle in the nineteenth century and the twentieth (to say nothing of earlier periods).⁵¹

To suggest, in contradistinction to such received views of the singularity of caste, that purity and pollution or indeed hierarchy are not its invariant, dominant principles, or that vast numbers of people on the subcontinent are not hailed by Brahminical norms, is not to propose that caste was an invention of the colonial order, as Nicholas Dirks sometimes comes close to doing, or that caste has not functioned, historically and in the present, as an instrument of subordination and humiliation, especially of those ranked low in a caste hierarchy. Rather, it is to indicate that within a nonegalitarian order there are “multiple configurations of caste, . . . multiple hierarchies, and multiple perspectives on social life.”⁵² An atomistic view of the caste subject and caste community has come to be challenged, notably by McKim Marriott, by a somewhat different emphasis upon the permeability, circulation, and transformation that mark caste being and caste relationship rather than an absolutist notion of hierarchy or of purity. Marriott’s well-known discussion of the constitution of body and person in Hindu India has described the transactional and transformational logic that governs the relation between persons in India, persons that he consequently characterizes as “dividual” (rather than “individual”) and highly permeable clusters of code and substance: “To exist, dividual persons absorb heterogeneous material influences. They must also give out from themselves particles of their own coded substances—essences, residues, or other active influences—that may then reproduce in others something of the nature of the persons in whom they have originated. Persons engage in transfers of bodily substance-codes through parentage, through marriage . . . , and through services and other kinds of interpersonal contacts. They transfer coded food substances by way of trade, payment, alms, feasts, or other prestations.”⁵³ Such traffic, it should be noted, is outside any liberal-egalitarian logic of modularity or likeness. These transactions between “dividuals” or between hierarchically arranged segments such as castes, families, and so on are carefully governed by rules about the direction in which coded substances are permitted to flow, though directions can change with context. Each maintains its identity and uniqueness through forms of exclusiveness (which are also forms of context-specific hierarchization), though these

entities are also interrelated and synthesized through complex processes of receiving and giving into increasingly broader social bodies.

Transaction and exchange among like and unlike biomoral subjects were bypassed in a colonial taxonomy of caste by a quite different emphasis: the contrast, implicit or explicit, between the freely choosing moral agent of modern European civilization and the native subject of caste, “incarcerated,” in Appadurai’s terms, within an intransigent moral and intellectual ecology.⁵⁴ Without using the language of incarceration, Dumont’s classic text *Homo Hierarchicus* in fact contrasts the *homo hierarchicus* of Hinduism with the *homo aequalis* of the West.⁵⁵ Yet the meliorative actions of a putatively liberalizing colonial state sometimes enhanced the rigidity of caste restrictions in the course of enacting legal reforms. The Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, which universalized upper-caste gendered restrictions on inheritance, maintenance, and custody and imposed them on lower-caste women in the course of legalizing Hindi widow remarriage, is a case in point.⁵⁶ If, as Anupama Rao observes, the colonial state acted “erratically” in its attempts to expand the freedoms of the historically downtrodden “by bringing them into the domain of Western progress and improvement,” this may have been a function both of its failures to anticipate the results of its legislation and of its own desire to maintain caste privileges in at least some instances.⁵⁷

Moreover, as the instance in the preceding section of Anglo-Indian fears about the dangers of the borrowed breast indicates, vigilance over the biomoral substance of unequally constituted subjects was not an exclusively Hindu or Muslim property. If, as Dirks maintains, caste in its present or official form is a modern construction that cannot be fully understood outside the context of British colonialism, it might also be possible to suggest that Anglo-Indians were themselves hailed by caste in unforeseen ways. It is no accident that it is the young “country-born” Irish lad Kimball O’Hara, rather than the Indians, who attends to the landscape of the Grand Trunk Road as a gigantic and endlessly fascinating compendium of caste.⁵⁸ But Anglo-Indians did not simply know caste, they also made it their own, both in the sense of formalizing it through the modes of applied law and socioreligious taxonomy and in the sense of submitting to its mandates. That they often used the metaphor to define their own deeply hierarchical society, headed by the Brahmins of the covenanted civil service, is well known.⁵⁹ At times they even seemed actuated by a certain form of caste competitiveness with the original

subjects of caste; the events of 1857, for instance, make this cannibalization of and by caste visible (see chapter 1).

What these examples help to highlight is the logic of permeability rather than of inviolability that often marks the workings of an alimentary order. In the instance above, Anglo-Indians come to be possessed by caste. Conversely, it is analytically helpful to investigate a South Asian gastropolitics and gastropoetics (to the degree that it can be held apart from an Anglo-Indian alimentary order) not so much in terms of an Indic focus that is historically immutable and restrictively defined—though there is no doubt Indic texts and practices of alimentary and commensal permission and prohibition are entirely crucial to such analysis—as in terms of contingency, encounter, translation, contestation, and amalgamation. At almost all points the purported particularities of a South Asian alimentary grammar are interlinked with and illuminated by non-South Asian modes of alimentary discourse. For instance, a consideration of Indian famine needs to be vectored through a broader imperial understanding of poverty and relief policy; famine relief so-called in Ireland thus brings similar endeavors in India into legibility. Likewise, Gandhi's ethics of everyday embodied practice are not really fully explicable except in terms of a global conversation on consumption, ethics, and spiritual and somatic perfectibilism in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, with its emphasis on the cultivation of technologies of the self-sufficient masculine body. In the case of the celebrated gastronome Madhur Jaffrey as well, questions of citizenship, assimilation, westernization, and authenticity come to be precipitated through the experience of diasporic voyaging in London and through a prior British investment in the glamour of spices.

Even or perhaps especially in the production of states and conditions that supposedly distinguish an Indian alimentary particularity—vegetarianism, famine, spices, even caste practices of proximity and avoidance—there is the trace of foreign encounter, ingestion and occasional indigestion, that is, metamorphosis both expected and unlooked-for. Can one name this encounter or exchange a form of (Derridean) anthropophagy, an inescapable and inescapably violent confrontation with the other into which one is inserted outside the structures of consent? If the bodily intervention that is alimentation involves injury and fragmentation, might it also involve some form of prosthesis, something both alien and critically necessary to function? The examples above are a reminder that nonvampiric, that is to say, nonidealist, eating can suggest new rather

than only self-evident and censorious possibilities for thinking about alimentation's promise of assimilation and self-derangement.

Eating Well?

If the colonial order described above was marked by forms of disgust and deprivation, then can one think of postcoloniality as the promise of eating well, both in the sense of abnegating dearth and in the sense of partaking in a relationship of hospitality with the other? The question of famine has famously served, as it does for the economist and moral philosopher Amartya Sen, as a paradigmatic instance of the injustices of colonial rule and the promise of redress that its abolition offers; hence his oft-cited claim that famines occur in totalitarian rather than democratic dispensations. Famine was one of the notorious features of colonial rule, British rule in India being bookended by two notable instances, the Bengal famine of 1769–70 and that of 1943–44. At the beginning of the twentieth century Indian critics of the political economy of British colonialism took pains to draw attention to the policies that produced such catastrophes, Romesh Chunder Dutt in particular emphasizing the increased revenue demands made upon agriculturalists in the nineteenth century. They noted that even the Bengal famine of 1770, which caused a loss of ten million lives and the depopulation of severely affected areas, did not impede the work of tax collectors. In 1771, in the aftermath of the famine year, tax revenues went up because of the intense pressures to maximize the profits of the East India Company.⁶⁰ Sen does not focus on state policy as much as Dutt, and he does not necessarily use the term *postcolonial* to describe his vision of a just order; his preferred terms are *democracy* and *totalitarianism*. But since he uses the Bengal famine of 1943–44, on the verge of a subcontinental passage out of colonialism, as an exemplary instance of the failure of state responsibility, it is not entirely unjustifiable to see its historical context as exemplary of the totalitarianism he denounces.

The subject of famine brings into visibility in a striking way questions of equity and access as well as questions of normality and anomaly or crisis. Does famine constitute a rupture in the existing moral economy, a breakdown of normal modes of access, entitlement, and redress? Or does it bring into scandalous relief everyday forms of poverty and inequality? Does the definition, by analysts and state alike, of famine as a problem of scale (and subsumable therefore within an idiom of crisis) obscure quoti-

dian experiences of alimentary and medical dearth? Sen has argued persuasively that modern famines are not caused in any fundamental way by simple lack of food or other ecological disturbances such as droughts and floods but can sometimes occur even when there is no diminution in the quantities of food available. Droughts, floods, crop disease, and shortfalls in production might create the proximate conditions for the onset of famine, but they cannot explain why people come to starve, sometimes to death. Indeed, the history of modern famines reveals that these phenomena are often “boom famines.” Far from being a leveler, famine has generally tended to exacerbate extant forms of inequality and exploitation, including gendered ones.⁶¹

If famine was the sign of a colonial, nonrepresentative alimentary and moral order, postcoloniality, or decolonization, was meant to effect its reversal. This was an urgent task, given India’s unique status after 1947 as the world’s largest democracy that was also home to the largest number of poor people. But the emphasis on food security in the planning of the postcolonial state, especially in its early years—a priority that might seem to accentuate Sen’s emphasis on the moral economy of democracy—has failed decisively to curb conditions of alimentary inequality and alimentary violence, including hunger and malnutrition, and its record has been widely understood to be “meager, disappointing, and failure-ridden.”⁶² The postcolonial dispensation was intended from the start to be the principal, if not the one and only, agent for the material and social uplift of its citizens and for providing relief under conditions of catastrophe. Many of the functions of education, medical services, and social welfare that the colonial state had been willing to leave to voluntarist and associational groups, including political organizations, came now to be the function of the state, which was vested with a representative and a pastoral, or at least meliorative, character toward those it was expected to hail as its constituents rather than its subjects.⁶³ The desire for political legitimacy thus necessitated a partially welfarist orientation. This was aimed where rural populations were concerned at redressing some of the inequalities in the ownership and use of land, an orientation that was often at odds with the state’s alliances with dominant groups in a highly feudalized rural sector and a strong developmental imperative that occasionally sought to sidestep the messier aspects of democracy. As Niraja Gopal Jayal, who describes the Indian state as being interventionist rather than welfarist, notes, “[The] poverty alleviation strategy . . . was a project aimed at ridding society, especially rural society, of acute poverty, rather

than any more ambitious project of enhancing, much less maximising, welfare. . . . It sought to fulfil its rather limited aims without in any way touching, much less damaging, the interests of the rural rich, or disturbing the rural power structure.”⁶⁴

Besides, as Partha Chatterjee usefully observes, these forms of welfare rarely if ever entailed any active participation by the poor and dispossessed in the name of a moral claim upon the state as its citizens. He makes an important conceptual distinction between citizens and populations. The first is defined as an ideal bourgeois type, vested with the associational powers of civil society and the moral and legal privilege of partaking of the sovereignty of the state. Populations, he says, can be the subjects of governmentality and are “empirical categories of people with specific social or economic attributes that are relevant for the administration of developmental or welfare policies.” They can be identified and affirmatively acted upon as the addressees of a welfare based upon a cost-benefit analysis which is often coded as charity rather than rights-based redistributive justice. But such welfare, often of a distinctly ad hoc variety, belongs to a different category of democratic access from the moral legitimacy of the citizen who has the right to have rights, as it were.⁶⁵ This weakly and contradictorily welfarist orientation of the state is further compromised by its strong predilection, especially in matters of law and order, for techniques of governance inherited from an authoritarian colonial order. Ranajit Guha has characterized such techniques as the exercise of “dominance without hegemony.”⁶⁶

The question of subalternity remains stubbornly lodged within the alimentary and moral economy of the postcolonial order. Mahasweta Devi has written acerbically about the lack of fit between the state’s languages of statistical triumph (fueled by the Green Revolution) and the inescapability of famine for the most disenfranchised of India’s poor, whose sufferings exceed any available language of sociological realism. If subalternity has been seen, by Antonio Gramsci as well as by the Subaltern Studies group, perhaps most notably by Spivak, as constituting a certain kind of epistemological and representational limit, the work of Mahasweta underlines the imaginative and ethical effortfulness involved in thinking the question of subaltern being and subaltern embodiment. Her work suggests that material on appetite, digestion, and pollution can serve as a remarkably apposite means of examining questions of broad ethical import, including the question of responsibility to non-like others. As we have seen, to eat, to abstain deliberately from eating, or to have

to go without eating is to pose questions of identification, desire, difference, and responsibility—responsibility to other humans at the very edge of human/nonhuman being, including the monstrously human or abhuman.⁶⁷ It is also to be inserted into responsibility with respect to non-human animals and sometimes to specters and gods, all of whom partake in one form or another in the ethically charged and complex questions of sacrifice—whether self-sacrifice or other-sacrifice—manifest in an unequal alimentary order.

Alimentary Tracts

How do appetites, hungers, compulsions, excesses, intoxications, aversions, and addictions help to institute, enact, or unsettle one's sense of identities and histories in the colonial period and the postcolonial aftermath? *Alimentary Tracts* seeks to underscore the productivity of recuperating and analyzing often-overlooked social and bodily grammars of colonial encounter and postcolonial development—grammars that can substantially recast existing accounts of events, communities, and persons. As I have suggested above, the strong, continuing interest in the forms of embodiment under colonialism has not fully incorporated the ways in which questions of alimentation performed a critical rather than an epiphenomenal role in matters of bodied experimentation, transformation, and retrenchment. In thinking of the representational and carnal economies of the contact zone, whether in colonialism or in postcoloniality, such scholarship has analyzed brilliantly the psychopolitical and aesthetic entailments of systems of racial taxonomy and spatial and sexual segregation, all of which are frantically policed and regularly breached. What this book proposes is that the alimentary tract is a boundary, a fiercely policed but also a contested and hotly trafficked one, just as much as any dividing line that might separate the *medina* from the settlers' town in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Who eats and with whom, who starves, and what is rejected as food are fundamental to colonial and postcolonial making—and unmaking. It is crucial to examine the nuances of the topological language of alimentation, especially as it is used to think through the complex entailments of a congeries of articulated concepts: violence, desire, intimacy, assimilation, reproduction, transformation, subalternization, and justice. This is what the book seeks to underline, even as it recognizes that the palate cannot be considered except within a broader consideration of embodiment, one that would involve its relation to other

senses or vehicles of incorporation and transformation, including especially olfaction, touch, hearing, and sight. The book thus applies itself to a scrutiny of the mundane and embodied, the aesthetic, and the ethico-political aspects of a colonial and postcolonial alimentary order. Four chapters address themselves to disgust, abstention, dearth, and appetite, which function simultaneously as topoi and tropes of alimentation.

The events and protagonists that instantiate these topoi and tropes also correspond in a very loose way to various historical stages in a chronology of a global modernity: colonialism, nationalism, decolonization and postcoloniality, and diaspora and globalization under late capitalism. They encompass iconic figures and moments of explicit historical crisis but, just as importantly, the banal dietary economies of the everyday. The first station on this very broad historical arc is the so-called Mutiny of 1857, memorable as one of the most spectacular instances of anticolonial insurgency in the nineteenth century. Despite the relatively small number of European casualties sustained during the uprising (the mortality figures on the side of the Indians have never been tallied up in any convincing fashion), especially in comparison with those of other military conflicts such as the Crimean War that was its immediate predecessor, it registered in the popular and official (Anglo-Indian and British) imagination as one of the most terrifying and unforgettable events of an otherwise robustly imperial century.⁶⁸ For many commentators, colonial and postcolonial, the syllabaries of caste abomination marshaled by the mutineers and their civilian rebel counterparts were the accents of an increasingly archaic social and ethical order, one that had perforce to give way before the inexorable engine of modernization that was the British empire in India. Caste here is the figure and institution that signifies all that is backward about the Indian as a sociopolitical and material body, marked by improper ingestions, improper aversions, and improper evacuations. And yet, while the Anglo-Indian sought to cultivate an aesthetics of distance and disgust—a modern and rational disgust, grounded in hygiene rather than in the perverse logic of religious pollution—from the Indian, these distinctions came to break down in an event of shared bodily trauma and shared alimentary fantasies. The Mutiny is in some senses a textbook case of the workings of caste fantasy, not simply for the Indians who were scripted as its proper devotees but also, and just as crucially, for Anglo-Indians. The experience of somatic disturbance, including hunger, filth, overcrowding, disease, and decomposition, served to pull the Anglo-Indian into the orbit of the other in a

way that disallowed the possibility of remaining himself; it established the Anglo-Indian as the subject of caste at the very moment and through the same events that served to accentuate the hyphen that held apart Anglo and Indian.

Continuities as well as ironic juxtapositions mark the sequence of the chapters. The economies of excess, avoidance, and intimacy that mark the Anglo-Indian experience of distaste and despair are followed by a chapter on abstinence, which is both the obverse of and similar to excess. It speaks in ways expected and unexpected to the hyperbolic performative idioms of one of the twentieth century's most prominent vegetarians, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, also known as the mahatma. I should emphasize that vegetarianism is not in itself an instance of alimentary abstinence unless one takes carnivory as the condition of alimentary normality; many millions of people all over the world, but especially in India, inhabit a normal, everyday vegetarianism throughout their lives with no sense that it involves any form of sacrifice of pleasure, health, or indeed variety. But for Gandhi vegetarianism was very emphatically the cornerstone of an ethics of abstinence. The chapter maps a trajectory of his gastropolitics, from the carnivorous mandate of the early years, during which he associated meat eating with nationalist duty, to the diasporic discovery of vegetarianism in London and finally to the carefully elaborated alimentary rigors and public fasts of the later years. All of this stresses how profoundly somatic Gandhi's "experiments in truth" were and how pronounced was his belief that self-rule at a national level was meaningless without self-rule at the most banal and intimate bodily level. The chapter simultaneously scrutinizes the gendered familial and inter-subjective entailments of a Gandhian vegetarianism. While his vegetarianism has normally been considered—when it is given any consideration at all—as an instantiation of *ahimsaic* (nonviolent/noninjurious) virtue, his repeated alimentary crises around the care and feeding of family members suggest that the (self-)sacrificial logic of a consciously chosen masculine vegetarianism is vexed and ad hoc rather than resolved once and for all. The evidence of his biography and his writings suggests that the mouth can function as an instrument of violence, not only in its incorporations but also in its abstinences. Sacrifice here involves a staging of ambiguous effects rather than a definitive refusal of the violence of slaughter and the violence of ingestion.

Chapters 3 and 4 span the extremities of appetite that mark the state that is denominated the postcolonial, encompassing famine on the one

hand and gastronomy on the other. The third chapter, on the terrifying logic of hunger, famine, disenfranchisement, and disembodiment in postcolonial India, accentuates the importance of hunger and famine and the fears and fantasies associated with them as decisive, emblematic forces in Indian postcoloniality. This chapter devotes particular attention to Mahasweta Devi's hunger fictions, especially "Shishu" ("Children," 1979) and *Pterodactyl*, *Puran Sahay*, and *Pirtha* (1982). Written in the aftermath of the failures of decolonization and the crises of postcolonial state legitimacy dramatized most prominently by the brutal repression of the Naxalite movement against feudal exploitation of the rural poor and by Indira Gandhi's declaration of Emergency (1975–77), these fictions point to some of the most wrenching failures of decolonization.⁶⁹ Mahasweta's fictions dramatize the lack of access by the landless low-caste and tribal poor of the Indian hinterland to the bare necessities for survival, including water, salt, and basic food. None of these deficits of food or of justice can even be acknowledged by a postcolonial state that prides itself upon its enlightenment, even as it seeks to act affirmatively upon subaltern subjects who remain stubbornly outside the limits of official legibility and the rational calculus of uplift and charity. A consideration of Mahasweta's work draws attention to the enormous allegorical fecundity of famine, and its capacity to stage questions about responsibility, humanness, and the character of subaltern being. It does so by foregrounding the ways in which figures of the nonhuman—the ghost in "Shishu" and the pterodactyl in *Pterodactyl*—become for Mahasweta the most emblematic and peremptory figures of famine. Realism itself encounters its limit in the representation of famine; ghost stories, science fiction tales, animal allegories, and gothic fictions become the paradigmatic accounts of catastrophe and moral failure. These stories also permit one to ponder forms of witnessing and revelation that cannot be rendered into the usual modes of moral accounting; they compel one to confront the character of one's responsibility to beings who exist outside the limits of a liberal discourse of rights, equality, universality, and intelligibility.

The fourth chapter, which is about the emergence of an Indian gastronomy and an aesthetics of plenitude in a late capitalist diaspora, trains its attention upon the opposite bound of a postcolonial map of alimentation. This bound is marked by a turn away from the aversions, scarcity, and ascetic habitus of a colonial past and a postcolonial present in favor of a metaphors of abundance. It is marked too by the possibility of auto-ethnography (rather than the unrepresentability that typifies the victims

of famine). This chapter examines the writings, screen performances, and iconic status of Madhur Jaffrey, conceivably the greatest popular authority on Indian culinary arts in the United States and in Britain and a person who functions spectacularly as an exemplary figure of the nation in its moment of global emergence. Jaffrey's emergence is keyed in crucial ways to the deployment of an idiom of culinary authenticity and culinary corruption, the latter indexed for her by the ubiquitous association in the West of the terms *curry* and *curry powder* with subcontinental cuisine. Spices, once the raw material for a European vision of resplendent faraway worlds, come to be refurbished for her as a trope of authenticity, sequestered from the satisfactions, both crass and pathetic, of *curry powder*. As part of the drive to install authenticity, her texts seek to rekindle in her British and North American readers as well as in newly diasporic subcontinental ones an imaginative and culinary investment in spices. Yet if food serves as parabolic national form in her texts, the form through which dramas of national and familial duplicity and devotion are enacted, a careful parsing of the performative idioms of her screen performances and cookbooks supplements and queers a desired logic of nostalgia and authenticity. A sanitized diasporic vision of spices, historical fidelity, and pluralist nationalist longing gives way, perhaps ironically, to the staying power of *curry* and *curry powder*, so that the mistress of spices in her latest incarnation cannot but succumb to a British attachment to the institution of *curry*. A focus on her food writing and on her star image thus serves as an apt occasion for a thickening and rethinking of the historical hungers and the fantasmatic landscapes of alimentation with which the history of colonial expansion commences.

Coda

We went in search of a lonely spot by the river, and there I saw, for the first time in my life—meat. There was baker's [leavened] bread also. I relished neither. The goat's meat was as tough as leather. I simply could not eat it. I was sick and had to leave off eating.

I had a very bad night afterwards. A horrible nightmare haunted me. Every time I dropped off to sleep it would seem as though a live goat were bleating inside me, and I would jump up full of remorse.

—M. K. GANDHI, *Autobiography*

A focus on the alimentary tracts of colonial and postcolonial India has several lessons for students of literary, feminist, cultural, and area studies, some obvious, others less so. It enables us most obviously to scrutinize forms of soul making and self-fashioning that we have come to see as absolutely crucial to colonial transformation as situated simultaneously in theaters of the flesh and of the psyche, rather than the latter alone. Its absorption in banal and ephemeral practice sometimes provides a novel purchase on figures, texts, and events usually framed by less vulgar concerns. Perhaps most importantly, it insists that a scrutiny of a grammar of ingestion and avoidance involves an attentiveness to the complex moral structure of embodiment. And finally, it intimates that a testing of ethics, politics, and aesthetics upon the tongue can sometimes confound our received sense of just what eating, digestion, violence, assimilation, and relationship might be. If all eating is, as thinkers as distinct as Gandhi, the Jain philosophers, and Derrida have contended, a consumption of and with the other (one that is anthropophagic, in Derrida's terms), is such consumption always parasitic, a battenning upon the flesh of the other without any form of reciprocity or exchange? If so, the ancient Jain practice of *samadhi maran* (fasting to death as a form of enlightened practice) may be the only form of ethical living—that is to say, ethical living must be a form of ethical dying, at least for humans. Even this inexorably principled stance is predicated on the supposition that the body is properly one's own and can appropriately be devoted to auto-phagy; but, as we shall see in the following pages, autophagy is not separable in any self-evident fashion from the consumption of or violence against others.

Moreover, abstaining from the consumption of the nonhuman or human animal other may be based on something other or something more than the desire to exist in a relation of noninjury to the ecologies one inhabits. As the instances drawn from the gastropolitics of caste, whether Indian or Anglo-Indian, and the dietary reform movements of the nineteenth century in Britain, Russia, and the United States should show, abstention can be and often is deployed for the purpose of self-purification and the purgation of an abjected other; it is mobilized all too often as a powerful precaution against one's vulnerability to capture or contamination by the other. Thus James Laidlaw, in his study of Jain asceticism,

observes that the guarded Jain response to the accidental killing even of microbial life is not so much a safeguard against killing as it is an abjection of excessive life, the teeming world of *samsara* (the phenomenal world) represented by the microbes.⁷⁰ If, on the other hand, one's consumption of the other, whether human or nonhuman, is symbiotic rather than only a form of destructive absorption or self-destruction, our sense of who assimilates and who is assimilated and what that assimilation might involve—transformation? dyspepsia?—is profoundly deranged. Consumption may signify mastery over the other, but it may also signify one's subjection to the other, something that cannot entirely be refused. Thus the adolescent Gandhi's forbidden, abortive meal of goat's flesh results in a temporary becoming animal (though through an uncanny and guilt-stricken proximity to cooked butcher's meat more than through any substantive form of ingestion), as he feels and hears a goat bleating in his stomach. Is this a nightmare? An experience of possession? A rendering monstrous of the human body through a rearrangement of its morphology? Is he addressed by the goat? Or does the goat express itself through him? The alimentary tract that speaks in a goat's tongue offers no straightforward lesson but one that has to be strenuously and sometimes counter-intuitively learned.