



WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

Hard to Digest. Ethnographic Research on Agrifood Systems in the Age of Polycrisis

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Abstract: Government institutions across Europe and in Brussels covered in manure, sprayed with milk or having small bonfires blazing in front of them, while long lines of tractors block their streets. This scenery stands exemplary of the polycrisis of agriculture, rendering agrifood systems as key, yet highly polarizing subjects to study in today's world. Recent social theory brought forward different ways to study agrifood systems, either through an examination of the underlying capitalist logic of appropriation of "cheap natures"; or an exploration of multispecies entanglements structured by global commodity chains. Indeed, anthropological modes of explaining agrifood systems might require a balancing of approaches from political economy, political ecology, or new materialism. Moreover, although ethnographically rich, agrifood systems can be hard to digest at times if researched alone. In this panel, we wish to come together and delve on the theoretical toolkits appropriate to make sense of the complexities of agrifood systems in the current age and see how ethnographic research can contribute to understand them better. We are looking for contributions that address these following questions:

- Where do agrifood systems start and where do they end, and who draws the boundaries of what is visible and what remains invisible?
- How do we account for different practices of food production, circulation, and consumption while doing methodological justice to the expansive characteristics of agrifood systems as multi-scalar, multi-sited, and multi-species systems?
- How can solitary ethnographic work account for multi-layered global agrifood systems and what kind of collaborative work can be envisaged as alternative?

To find some answers to these challenges, we invite ethnographic work that stretches from the point of production to the act of consumption and reflects theoretically and methodologically on the diverse values that bind and unbind diverse sites along food commodity chains amid crises.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Monday, September 23, 2024 | Slot 4 | Room 3

Barbora Kyereko: Colonial Legacies and Trust Dynamics in Cocoa Production in Ghana: A Symmetrical Analysis of Agrifood Systems in the Global South

Alexandra Leca: Labeling of olive oil in the productions of small farmers in Greece

Ilze Mileiko: Forming food consumption habits in places of change: the case of Latvian rural youth amid the changing rural foodscape

Markus Enk: Agroforestry Systems and participative floristic survey methods as technical objects among the Apurinã in the Caititu Indigenous Land, Brazilian Amazon

Mariachiara Ficarelli: Wasted Energies: On the Life and Times of Clams and Methane in the Po River Delta.

SESSION PAPERS

Colonial Legacies and Trust Dynamics in Cocoa Production in Ghana: A Symmetrical Analysis of Agrifood Systems in the Global South

Barbora Kyereko

Cocoa production in Ghana is inextricably linked to its colonial past. The cultivation and production process is influenced by a multitude of actors, including pests and diseases, global market fluctuations, and knowledge-making practices. Subsistence farmers face both cultural and natural limitations that complicate the adoption of industry-preferred production methods, while lacking infrastructure hinders any attempts to move out of poverty. Scientific policies and international regulations further complicate these dynamics, often reinforcing the interests of powerful stakeholders while marginalizing local farmers who have for generations been constrained within boundaries established during the colonial era.

Based on my ethnographic fieldwork in Ghana, this presentation advocates for a symmetrical analysis that acknowledges the extensive political, historical, and relational networks underpinning the production, circulation, and consumption of cocoa. This approach emphasizes the need to understand agrifood systems in the Global South within their colonial historical contexts and through the lens of multi-species networks.

Trust plays a pivotal role in these dynamics. In the context of Ghanaian cocoa production, trust is often scarce, shaped by historical exploitation and contemporary inequalities. Farmers' mistrust in scientific institutions and international agencies is rooted in colonial exploitation and perpetuated by contemporary economic disparities, and bound within limitations of biological and scientific processes. This lack of trust impacts adoption of new agricultural practices or technologies, while simultaneously affirming farmers authenticity and independence within this complex ecosystem.

Collaborative ethnographic research is needed to provide a more holistic understanding

of these systems by integrating insights from various points along the production chain across the world. This collective approach, inclusive of researchers from the Global South, could illuminate the social and ecological stakes that hinder progress and predict the future of cocoa globally. By addressing issues of trust, anthropological research could address more equitable and even more productive agricultural and research practices.

Labeling of olive oil in the productions of small farmers in Greece

Alexandra Leca

The study of olive growing and olive oil production in Nafplio, Greece, reveals a complex interplay of socio-cultural, economic and ecological aspects. Olive production is deeply rooted in the Greek national identity, representing not only a food product but also a symbol of tradition, history and community values. In the Nafplio region, olive production, with all its challenges and particularities, is more than just an economic activity; it is an integral part of the cultural and social identity of the local people. In this way, olives and olive oil become more than just commodities: they become symbols of resistance to commoditization and of authenticity, reflecting a struggle to maintain a strong link with the land.

Small olive oil producers play an essential role in Greece's rural economy, but they face major challenges. The trend towards intensive farming methods, the bureaucracy and costs associated with implementing DOP/IGP quality systems, and consumer ignorance of these labels are major obstacles. This situation is important because it highlights the dual nature of certification processes such as DOP/IGP. On the one hand, these processes aim to protect and promote product quality and origin, providing a framework that enables producers to capitalize on their high-quality products and distinguish them from lower-quality products. On the other hand, certification processes can often be cumbersome, costly and require a high level of expertise and resources.

How do small-scale producers understand and apply PDO/PGI quality systems? The study aimed to obtain comprehensive and up-to-date data, enabling new understandings to be identified regarding the involvement of small olive oil producers in obtaining PDO and PGI certifications. The aim of this research is to better understand the factors that influence entry into the quality certification process, examining whether these procedures hinder the development of Greek markets for geographically indicated products.

Forming food consumption habits in places of change: the case of Latvian rural youth amid the changing rural foodscape

Ilze Mileiko

Among other elements of the agri-food system, food consumption asks for special attention from anthropologists when considering vulnerable populations and communities whose voice might be missing from the general dialogue about the challenges the agri-food systems face. The case of rural youth is interesting for this reason, as it presents a possibility to explore food consumption habits among people who experience significant simultaneous shifts both in their surrounding foodscape and in their personal lives. On one hand, while often imagined as more static than the vibrant cities, the changes of the Latvian rural foodscape over the last decades have been noteworthy and, among others, include changes in agricultural practices, the introduction

of global food products, closing of the local small grocery stores, and rising food prices which are also sensitive to the food transportation costs in more remote areas. Simultaneously, with rural areas offering less work and study opportunities than bigger cities, Latvian rural youth themselves are often pushed towards significant personal changes earlier in life than youth in larger cities. What happens to the individual food consumption habits in times and places of constant flux? Are young people from smaller villages and more remote areas equipped to form healthy relationship with food for their forthcoming lives as grown-ups? These questions merit exploration through ethnographic research on the food consumption habits of Latvian rural youth.

The paper will present the initial conceptual framework for anthropological field work in Latvian rural areas that is being carried out as part of a doctoral research project on food consumption habits of rural youth. It will also include the findings from the first set of interviews carried out for the study, including interviews with young people from rural regions and leading specialists working with food policy in Latvia.

Agroforestry Systems and participative floristic survey methods as technical objects among the Apurinã in the Caititu Indigenous Land, Brazilian Amazon

Markus Enk

This paper mobilizes Simondon's (2017) notion of technical object to examine ethnographic possibilities when constructing a floristic survey with the indigenous Apurinã aimed at understanding their Agroforestry Systems (SAFs). The Caititu Indigenous Land, located in the urban fringe of the city of Lábrea, Brazilian Amazon, has extensive fields of a grass-type called furão (*imperata brasiliensis*) that indicate its damaged ecology since before their land's demarcation in 1991. Since 2010, the Apurinã have collaborated with NGOs to reforest their territory through SAFs and overcome their dependency on the city's industrialized food. During my fieldwork in 2023/4, the Associação dos Produtores Indígenas da Terra Caititu (APITC / Caititu's Land Indigenous Producers' Association) invited me to build a methodology with them to collect data regarding the agrobiodiversity of 21 hectares of reforested areas and preliminarily map the Caititu Land's 'productive potential'. We decided to develop a floristic survey which, due to restricted access to the territory and technology, was devised into analogical processes based on social cartography. It included the creation of a floral legend by 'translating' species into symbols and systematically recording the plant-symbols in square-lined paper sheets to form a SAF map in postcards, additionally collecting geographic coordinates using the application 'TimeStampCamera'. Two questionnaires were applied to assess the context of the SAFs as well as the consumption and commercialization of species encountered in each village. Interpreting the survey's process and its adjustment under optics of technique-based approaches and the genesis of a 'technical object' (i.e., counting plant 'children' as pineapples and peach-palms, and species' translation to their indigenous language) was a valuable tool to comprehend the Caititu's food landscape. Additionally, it turned visible the ways indigenous producers attempt to construct notions of collectivity through food in ways that link territorial reforestation with the Apurinã's reclaim of their indigenous identity.

Wasted Energies: On the Life and Times of Clams and Methane in the Po River Delta.

Mariachiara Ficarelli

What happens when agrifood systems are approached as ones that are no longer premised on alimentary production? What might it mean to build a politics of food that is not centered on changing practices of consumption? This paper proposes an ethnographic approach to agri-food systems that moves beyond a methodological focus on singular commodities that has tended to be the norm in political economy, perhaps made most famous by Sydney Mintz's pioneering study of sugar. Rather, I suggest that a focus on the cultivation and harvesting of "energy" (rather than "food") that new boundaries and politics of agro-energetic systems might be rendered visible. My paper will ground this approach by attending to the different types of "energy" production in the basso Polesine region of Veneto, where the Po River meets the Adriatic Sea. I trace the historical and contemporary forms of methane extraction and production and its intertwining with the seemingly disparate sector of intensive bivalve mollusk production. In doing so, my paper will also explore the very limits of a conceptual use of energy for anthropological theory and environmental history.