

CEREAL BELONGINGS

Introduction: a cultural perspective on cereals as a resource

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ABSTRACT. This collection of papers addresses the connection between the hierarchy of cereals and social dynamics, with cases from Mexico, Morocco, Central Asia and central India. The authors study cereals less as specific food items in a culinary culture and more generally as hierarchically juxtaposed food resources which are intimately linked to social relationships and identities. Taking up recent interdisciplinary contributions to the study of resources, cereals are seen as a means to create, sustain and alter social relationships and identities. The authors highlight the relationship between cereals and identity/alterity, the correlation between status and specific cereals, the role of grains in establishing the flow of ‘life’ between humans and non-humans, and the connection between religious conversion and the preference for new food resources.

CEREALS AS A FOOD RESOURCE

All over the world people consume different cereals on a daily basis. It is therefore no exaggeration to state that cereals have been one of humanity’s most essential food resources in both past and present. In recent decades, studies of food in general and particular food items such as cereals in particular have acquired immense popularity in various disciplines. The scientific literature on food abounds, with currently about thirty different journals on food available (Antrosio and Han 2016). In social and cultural anthropology, researchers studying the social and cultural relevance of food have developed distinctive theories, courses and text books. This ‘food anthropology’, in Germany often called ‘Kulinarische Ethnologie’ (e.g. Kofahl und Schellhaas 2018), inquires into forms of production and preparation, contexts of eating, the symbolism of food, consumption patterns and various other aspects related to certain types of food. The present collection of papers addresses some of these issues, though the contributors study cereals less as the specific food items of a culinary culture and more generally as hierarchically juxtaposed food resources that are intimately linked to social relationships and identities.

The term ‘resource’ has recently been re-conceptualised by a collaborative research centre which attempts to overcome the limitations of a purely economic understanding of resources (Bartelheim *et al.* 2015). Economists often define resources as limited and mostly natural means of production which need to be used in an optimal and sustainable way to save costs and reduce long-term risks. From this point of view, cereals are essential resources of agricultural production, and modern technologies are used in order to increase cereal production, prevent diseases, minimise costs and optimise distribu-

tion systems. The value of cereals in economics is therefore first of all expressed in its price. This marks a major contrast to socio-cultural understandings of resources values.

The recent 'resource turn' in anthropology, archaeology and history (Hardenberg, Bartelheim and Staecker 2017) calls instead for a non-essentialist understanding of resources, meaning that anything can be turned into a resource when people ascribe a high value to material or immaterial things and organise themselves in order to utilize them. Seen in this way, even classic 'natural' resources such as soil or water are 'socio-cultural' resources because their values are not natural, but constructed by social actors sharing culturally derived interests. The distinction between 'natural' and 'cultural' or 'social' resources thus loses its significance, as the word 'resource' already implies that its value derives from human interests situated in specific cultural and thus historical contexts. One may, of course, argue that certain resources are more essential than others and thus have a 'natural' value because human life intimately depends on them. For example, food and water seem to be universally relevant because without them humans cannot survive. Yet, when studying concrete cases, it becomes apparent that any specific food item derives its value from social processes, not natural desires or necessities. The selection of certain cereals out of a range of available crops, the existence of food taboos and the development of norms concerning fasting and feasting exemplify this argument. The values ascribed to such resources are therefore never 'naturally' given, but are an expression of shared, yet often contested ideas about what is 'good' in life, what people should strive for and how these ideals can be realised in a specific historic constellation.

The use, transformation or production of valued resources is embedded in various human activities such as labour, exchange, accumulation, distribution and consumption, all of which depend on social relationships. This holds true for non-capitalist as well as capitalist forms of resource use. One might therefore suggest that resources are never merely a means of 'economic', but also, and primarily of social production, reproduction and innovation. Similarly, the perceived differences in value between resources cannot simply be reduced to price, but are intimately linked to the creation or perpetuation of social hierarchies, acts of social inclusion and exclusion, state interventions and local forms of resistance.

By understanding cereals as resources, the authors of this collection of papers aim to draw attention to these values and their social implications and to provide a useful comparative angle for case studies from different parts of the world. Although we are not studying culinary systems as such, we are aware that a major context for turning cereals into socially relevant resources is the preparation, distribution and consumption of food. Cereals share with many other resources a material character, yet when turned into food their distinctive social character comes to the fore. As Anna Meigs notes, 'it is ingested, it is eaten, it goes inside' (1997:104). Meigs' important observation stresses the power of food in creating forms of identity and alterity, self and other.

There is, however, much more to cereals as (social) food resources. Often, food production is a collaborative social effort that generates and maintains groups, as well as gender distinctions. Food resources can be stolen or shared, destroyed or exchanged, processes that create kin or enemies in ways that appear entirely natural. To amend Marshall Sahlins' dictum, food makes friends (and foes), and friends share food. Both the performative or generative and the prescriptive or normative dimensions of the production and maintenance of social relationships bear heavily on food resources.¹ As a potentially scarce resource, food is closely connected to questions of wealth or poverty and the struggle to become (or stay) wealthy and to avoid ending up (or remaining) poor.

What are often not taken sufficiently into account in ethnographic descriptions are the aesthetic dimensions of food, the smell, taste, colour and tactile qualities of the end product itself, as well as the processes involved in producing it. It is exactly these qualities that people appreciate in their own food and often miss in the food of others. Values, identities and attitudes become embodied in these sensual dimensions of food. More than anything else, these aspects of food make migrants long for the food through which they hope to reproduce 'home' to some extent, regardless of where they are. The aesthetic, moreover, is closely connected to the affective. The smell and sight of food indexes delight or disgust, love or anger (Berger 2011). Food is the first thing a human being loves and the first thing whose intermittent loss he or she has to suffer (Freud 1997). Everywhere food is empowered by strong affections, and the management of food also entails navigating people's emotions and biases, even hatreds (Ghassem-Fachandi 2009). Few things serve as aptly as food in engendering the love of one's own nation or in dismissing others as 'dog-cookers', for example, as in ancient India, or as 'cannibals'.²

The distinction of 'our' and 'their' food already hints at the hierarchies related to food all over the world. From a theoretical point of view, anthropologists have tried to identify certain correlations between hierarchies of food-stuffs and other aspects of culture and society.³ For example, in India the interrelations between caste hierarchies or class consciousness, certain categories of food, types of preparation, the status of the cooks, the lifestyles of consumers and related religious ideas and practices, as well as the gastro-politics involved, have been discussed in detail by various anthropologists.⁴ Such 'hierarchies of values' (Dumont 1992) are also a matter of the evaluation of cereals in different parts of the world, an observation that has brought together the authors of this collection of papers. In most places more than one type of cereal is produced, distributed and consumed, which very often corresponds to a number of social and cultural distinctions made by the people themselves. For example, certain grains may be

¹ See Sahlins (1965, 1985).

² See de Garine (2001), White (1992).

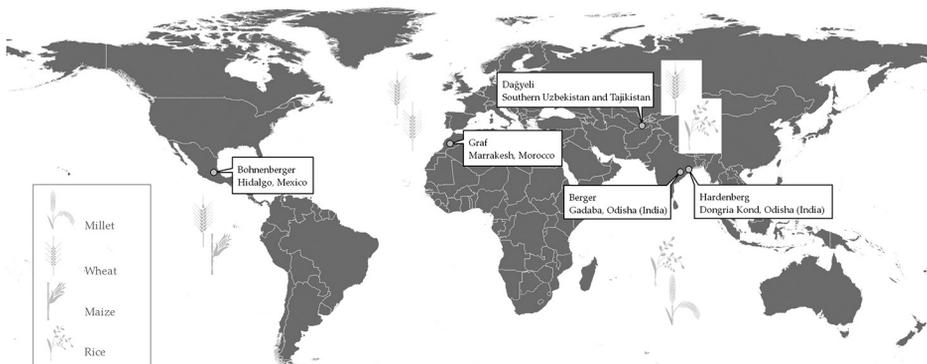
³ See, e.g., Lévi-Strauss (1965), Douglas (1977), Goody (1982).

⁴ See, e.g., Appadurai (1981), Berger (2011), Donner (2008), Gold (1998), Osella and Osella (2008).

considered to be more ‘civilized’, produced in a more ‘sophisticated’ manner or eaten by more ‘distinguished’ people than others. Some cereals are said to represent ‘real food’, while others are associated with the poor, unbelievers or outsiders. The leading question is how the hierarchy of cereals is related to the social order in various ways. Either the juxtaposition of cereals is an expression of socio-cultural dynamics or, conversely, cereals constitute and generate social relationships that may compete, be complementary, hierarchical or otherwise structured.

This collection of papers takes up this connection between the hierarchy of cereals and social dynamics and presents cases from different parts of the world: Mexico (Bohnenberger), Morocco (Graf), Central Asia (Dağyeli) and central India (Berger, Hardenberg). In the case of the Tepehua-speaking community of Huehuetla, Hidalgo, in Mexico, described by Anja Bohnenberger, the unique position of maize is challenged by wheat, which is increasing steadily in importance in both daily and ritual activities. Wheat is also the focus of the paper by Katharina Graf on Marrakech in Morocco, which discusses the competition and social implications of two types of wheat: soft wheat grains referred to as ‘farina’, and industrially produced hard wheat flour called ‘gmeh’. Similarly, Jeanine Dağyeli argues that in certain parts of Central Asia wheat has long been cultivated and has thus gained the status of the most desirable, spiritually laden and valued grain, although it faces competition from several other cereals, in particular rice. The two papers by Peter Berger and Roland Hardenberg on hierarchies of cereals in India both deal with a region where wheat is hardly of any importance, while rice has either long been a major staple crop alongside millet (Berger) or has more recently become the most important staple crop and thus competes with different types of millet (Hardenberg).

The articles collected here are thoroughly revised versions of papers presented at the 2017 conference of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie



Location of studies and relevant cereals (© Karsten Schmidt)

(DGSKA) in Berlin, at a panel organised by the authors of this Introduction under the title “Cereal belongings: the significance of staple crops in defining and contesting relatedness”. While each contribution has its own specific focus, the common interest in cereals as a food resource, and more specifically in the social hierarchies of cereals, enabled a comparative perspective to be adopted, the differences of contexts notwithstanding. The remainder of this Introduction elaborates on this comparative perspective and summarises some of the main results: the relationship between cereals and identity/alterity, the hierarchical juxtaposition of crops, the role of grains in establishing the flow of ‘life’ between humans and non-humans, and the connection between religious conversion and the preference for new food resources.

CEREALS IN COMPETITION: THE CASE STUDIES

Bohnenberger describes the case of the Tepehua-speaking community of Huehuetla, Hidalgo, in Mexico, where the significance of maize in both daily and ritual contexts is being challenged by wheat. Wheat is not cultivated in Huehuetla and must be imported from outside. Nonetheless sweet bread made from wheat is nowadays consumed along with coffee on a daily basis. In both ritual and secular contexts, sweet bread and coffee are used to welcome ‘visitors’, human as well as non-human. However, many older members of the community studied by Bohnenberger stated that, in contrast to food made from maize, ‘bread [from wheat] is not a meal’ (*‘pan no es comida’*). Maize is considered to share with humans a divine origin and to be a keeper of ‘life-force’, which is transmitted to humans by way of consumption. People treat maize crops like their own children and as a symbol and offering in various rites of passage.

Wheat – hard wheat, to be more precise – is also a key resource in Morocco for ‘crafting situated belonging’, as Graf puts it. As stated above, the hierarchy of juxtaposed cereals – here between hard and soft wheat – adds up to a general classification of people, practices and places. In this case, hard wheat – the grain and the flour, if home-made, being called *‘gmeh’* – evokes a whole imagery of home and of home-made, wholemeal, nourishing local production and health. It is contrasted with soft wheat, the grain of which being called *‘farina’*, the flour *‘fors’* and which is associated with cheap, low-quality, industrial mass production and government intervention. The former is connected to the mountain region (Maroc inutile), the latter to the plains (Maroc utile). Given these values, recent urban migrants, even if uprooted and poor, aim to recreate *beldi*, which, among other things, means ‘home’ and ‘home-made’. Making bread that contains at least some *gmeh* means making one’s identity, whether national or local, individual or collective; it creates belonging, whether to the Moroccan soil, to one’s home village or to all Moroccans as Muslims, as only home-made bread contains *baraka*, God’s blessing.

Even where it is economically marginal or has only recently been introduced, rice often is a resource for expressing or creating social status. Dağyeli, for example, mentions that rice is a prestige food that is often served at feasts, even though, as described above, wheat has a higher status and is much more ritually embedded. Similarly, among the Dongria Kond rice is used to honour high-status guests such as affinal partners or state officials on festive occasions, while food and drinks produced from millets are served to one's own people and consumed on a regular basis within the family (Hardenberg). Although rice and millets are subsumed within the same local category, namely 'lahi', they nevertheless express different relationships. Rice is acquired mostly from external sources, that is, the state and shops or traders, and is hardly ever cultivated by the people themselves. It is nonetheless a proper gift to make to non-humans such as gods, ancestors and ghosts, as well as to marriage partners in affinal clans (*kuda*). Millets, on the other hand, are grown on the swiddens and are neither bought nor sold in the market. What complicates the situation is the distinction between millets for eating and millets for drinking. The former consists mainly of little millet and pearl millet, which are prepared like rice and served and eaten in the same way. Like rice, these millets are associated with the east and with the gods, being the local equivalents of the externally acquired rice. Finger millet, on the other hand, is mainly used in preparing a gruel that is consumed on a daily basis. It is connected with the west and the dead. Though of immense nutritional value, this gruel has little social or ritual value and does not produce or regenerate relationships to the gods as a resource.

As Berger shows, the situation among the Gadaba is both very similar and different at the same time. Here too finger millet is consumed as a gruel, and little millet is eaten as 'rice'. The latter has a low status, however, and would not be offered to guests unless 'real rice' is not available. Among the Gadaba too, finger millet is associated with the dead, as indicated with regard to the death ritual mentioned above. In contrast to the Dongria case, however, finger millet and rice are both traditional staple crops and are combined to make up every meal, being eaten twice a day. As resources finger millet and rice fulfil very different functions. The blood, meat (usually from the head) and liver of a sacrificed animal is mixed with rice to produce a very potent kind of sacred food that generates, maintains or transforms social relationships of all kinds. It is productive of consanguinity as well of affinity, transforms the person's ritual status, reintegrates those who have been excluded from the community, ritually excludes a sister from the commensal community and establishes bonds between gods and people. Significantly, this sacrificial process always produces a hierarchy of food, people and places. It is linked to social distinctions and thus to status, as in the cases described by Hardenberg and Dağyeli, where the distinction between cereals correlates with the highland/lowland contrast, and more generally to society overall. Rice as part of this sacrificial food epitomises Gadaba society. Millet is not productive of any specific kind of social relationship, though it is particularly related to consanguinity. One could say that millet is not about society but about being. In a close transformative relationship with blood and the earth,

millet maintains life and may postpone death. Millet is existential, not structural (and structuring) like rice and is thus a very different resource than rice.

In looking at cereals as resources, many dimensions come to the fore that might be distinguished analytically from each other for the sake of the structure of an introduction like the present one, but which are nonetheless closely interrelated. Two features will be mentioned separately in the following in order to stress the fact that they are relevant to nearly all the contributions in this special section, while being closely related to the property of crops as cultural resources: first, the contrast between own and other, inside and outside, that is at the heart of probably all constructions of identity or belonging; and secondly the dimension of change.

IDENTITY AND ALTERITY

All the cases presented here demonstrate that one major function of staple crops is to constitute identities on various levels, usually by ascribing otherness of some sort to particular crops, people and places. We have already mentioned the Moroccan distinction between hard and soft wheat that reinforces the geographical distinction between highland and lowland, and the case of the Dongria Kond discussed by Hardenberg, where rice is regarded as a crucial resource in dealing with the outside world, while millet is connected to the inside. Similarly, Bohnenberger points out how maize constitutes closeness quite existentially by circulating 'life-force', while wheat (like beef), lacking this capacity, is nevertheless an important means of establishing relationships with the outside world, including visitors and foreigners. Among the Gadaba of central India too, cereals are related in complex ways to both the classification of 'own' and 'other' and their production. The most basic principle of social classification is represented by the contrast between consanguines and affines, which also informs the classification of millet and rice. While the former is considered to pertain to the village and is thus consanguinal, the latter is regarded as affinal and outside. Yet, millet and rice are quite different kinds of resources when it comes to the (re-)creation of identity and alterity. As part of sacrificial food – which is itself a combination of affinal and consanguinal elements – rice recreates, maintains and dissolves social relationships, both affinal and consanguineal. Millet, by contrast, does not constitute a hierarchy or make social distinctions, but is connected to life and death – it is about being, not structure. In the case of Hardenberg's study, rice and millets epitomise the contrast between highlanders and lowlanders and their different forms of agricultural production. Rice dominates in the valleys and coastal areas, where in the past the kings used to rule and where nowadays the government has its capital. Rice serves as the staple, as 'civilised' food and as a proper contribution to the nourishment of the 'poor' tribals on the part of the government. Millets, on the other hand, are intimately connected with the practice of shifting

cultivation on the steep hills and with one's own way of life, that is, with one's family, clan and ancestors.

JUXTAPOSED CROPS

The most important commonality linking the contributions presented here is the focus on the dynamics between two (or more) crops that motivates and is correlated with various cultural, political and historical processes. While the kinds of juxtaposition involved may differ, the two (or more) crops concerned are never equal but always implicated in a hierarchical relationship. Moreover – and unsurprisingly, given the general propensities of food mentioned above – this hierarchy of crops corresponds with asymmetries in all kinds of social domains, often resulting in elaborate classifications that establish correlations between crops, cultural geographies, genders, types of people, life-styles and even kinds of being.

We will spell out these dimensions in relation to these juxtapositions of crops below, but let us start by mentioning the main crops discussed by the various authors first. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, as Dağyeli shows, wheat is superior to rice, partly because it is embedded in a history of sacred narratives and ritual practices, even though the rice dish (*palov*) has become an important marker of Central Asian food identity. In contrast, Bohnenberger analyses the high potential ascribed to maize in Mexico. While maize is considered to contain 'life-force', wheat is regarded as lacking this value. In the case of Morocco described by Graf, the contrast consists in two different varieties of the same crop, wheat. The urban residents studied by Graf differentiate between 'soft' (*fors*) and 'hard' (*fino*) wheat flour, a distinction entailing basic questions of belonging, or of 'cereal citizenship', as the author puts it. The Dongria Kond of central India described by Hardenberg contrast millets with rice and also millets for drinking with millets for eating. While millets are strongly connected to shifting cultivation, the locality and Dongria identity, rice is mostly imported and associated with relations with 'outsiders', including the gods and ancestors who are approached in rituals. The same crops are also juxtaposed by the neighbouring Gadaba, but here, in contrast to all the other cases discussed, the two crops involved – rice and millet – are not (yet) in competition but constitute an intimate and elaborate complementarity.

FLOW OF LIFE

The cultivators of these staple crops find themselves involved in fundamental processes of the circulation of life and its transformations. Often, these processes are embedded in elaborate ritual practices (as well as oral or written narratives or myths) that may also involve a number of non-human actors and transform one kind of being into another.

Three contributions discuss ritual systems in considerable detail. Largely on the basis of Russian colonial and Soviet ethnographies, Dağyeli analyses the wheat-cycle, focusing on pre-socialist Central Asia. She complements her historical analysis with ethnographic observations in contemporary southern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Of particular relevance for the people is the spring festival of Navruz, which serves as a nodal point in the cultivation of wheat and in respect of the division into male and female spheres of ritual and economic activity. The ritual takes place when the snow melts, its first part being a solely male affair. One elderly man represents Bobo-yi Dehqon, a figure who, depending on one's perspective, is a patron saint and apical cultivator-ancestor or merely a knowledgeable farmer. Particularly relevant from a comparative perspective is the identification of oxen and humans in the process of venerating these important agricultural animals. During Navruz human food is offered to the oxen, and the farmers not only eat after the animals – thus indicating the latter's contextual superiority – but also smear the oxen's left-over food into each other's faces. Not only are humans and animals implicated in the flow of life, but the earth is included in ways that resemble the transformations discussed by Bohnenberger and Berger. It is significant that some snow is still lying on the fields when some seeds of wheat are scattered on it along with prayers and blessings. As the snow melts, the water takes these blessed seeds into the ground, thus apparently guaranteeing future fertility.

It is only after this sequence that women become involved in Navruz, which involves a dish called 'sumalak'. Significantly, this sweet dish is made from wheat berries that women have allowed to germinate in their houses before the ritual.⁵ With Navruz, Dağyeli argues, the female participation in the wheat cycle ends and the men take over. Germination as a transformation of food into plant brought about by women contrasts with milling performed by men as a transformation of plant into food. Navruz initiates the plant phase of the wheat cycle, which is dominated by men, starting with ritual ploughing and ending with milling. At this point the women-dominated food phase starts, lasting until Navruz, including storage and portioning. Gendered cultivation activities are thus mediated and integrated into the ritual cycle.

As in this example from Central Asia, the Tepehua-speaking community of Huehuetla in northeast Mexico, described by Bohnenberger, and the tribal communities of central India, discussed by Berger and Hardenberg, ritually embed economic activities as part of the circulation of life, and both also understand crops as persons. This feature is not completely absent in the Central Asian case just discussed, as the heap of grain receives anthropomorphic features and is said to 're-present' Bobo-yi Dehqon (see Dağyeli), perhaps in de Coppet's sense (1992) of making present again, rather than merely symbolising. This blurring of the boundaries between humans, animals and plants is reminiscent of what one finds in other parts of the world, for instance,

⁵ Wheat is germinated in the same way in the context of rituals in central India, a region where wheat is grown not at all. See Otten (2009, 2014).

among the Wamira of Papua New Guinea, who regard taro as humans (Kahn 1986). In the Mexican case described by Bohnenberger, maize plants are considered to be as vulnerable as children and therefore require special ritual protection until they bloom. If mistreated, maize will retaliate. The 'life-force' of maize is transferred to humans through eating. Because of their shared diet, turkey and chicken are similar to humans, which makes them fit for sacrifice during rituals (*costumbres*). However, 'life-force' is not only returned in this way: by offering human corpses to the earth in burial, one returns them to the earth from which maize will grow again. Furthermore, Jesus and the Virgin Mary are included in the narratives concerning the circulation of life, as Jesus' blood generated the first crops (maize, chilli, beans) and the Virgin Mary's tears watered them.

The Gadaba case, described by Berger, presents striking similarities to the Mexican one, as here crops – rice and millet – are also thought of as being like humans and, as in the Mexican case, certain life-cycle rituals apply to the cereals: a post-natal ritual for millet that serves to protect the 'children of the village', and a wedding ritual for the rice that is brought into the village as a 'bride'. Moreover, humans give life to the earth (a deity) that enables the growth of crops, while conversely crops secure the life of humans. One aspect of the final death ritual makes this particularly clear. Here, a human being – a resurrected deceased person in the body of a living water buffalo – is killed on the millet fields in between the harvest cycles, its blood seeping into the earth (similar to Jesus' blood) where millet will soon grow again.⁶

CROP CONVERSION

One of the authors of this Introduction (Berger) has recently addressed the issue of conversion in India by discussing the relevance of certain 'locations' or areas of society that are of relevance to the processes that lead people to change their religious affiliations.⁷ At first sight, one might say, the present collection of articles deals with the 'other end' of society, that is, not with religion (and conversion to other religious affiliations), but with subsistence (and related changes), or the material dimensions of social life. However, this would suggest a clear dichotomy between 'base' and 'superstructure' and go against the position adopted by all the contributors to this special section, namely that subsistence and culture, or more specifically religion, cannot be separated from one another or considered independently. As Nurit Bird-David has argued with reference to hunter-gatherers, anthropologists study – or should study in any case – 'total life-form[s]' (2010:233), not separate the economy from social structure or religion. Given this holistic perspective, which resonates with the understanding of resources just out-

⁶ On animism and perspectivism among the Dongria Kond, see Hardenberg (forthcoming).

⁷ See Berger and Sahoo (forthcoming).

lined, it makes sense to assume that the neglect of a traditional staple crop has wider consequences for a society's life-style, and perhaps even its cosmology.

It may also work the other way around: abandoning a religion may motivate people to reject certain forms of subsistence that no longer seem to fit a new way of life. For instance, after converting from animism to Baptism, the Sora of central India also abandoned millet consumption because millets are associated with the ancestors and the younger generation wanted to replace the religious practices of the past.⁸ Among the Gadaba too, discussed by Berger, young people feel increasingly ashamed of some of their parents' practices, such as beef-eating, which seems to contradict 'mainstream Hindu culture'. Millet does not (yet) seem to be on the list of items to be abandoned, but it is considered a 'highland food' and as such of low status when seen from the lowland perspective. The marginalisation of millet, as Hardenberg argues, has a long history in Asia and Africa, where millets lose out in the long run in contrast to 'imperial crops', in particular rice, which represents supralocal power. Whether in relation to millet or other grains, crop diversity and cultural diversity, or 'theo-diversity', as Vitebsky calls it (2017:334), go together.

The relationship between cultivation and cosmology is clearly brought out by the Mexican example described by Bohnenberger. A change in subsistence patterns signals an earlier cosmological shift from a world in which humans and animals lived as companions talking to each other to a new order in which humans and animals have become separated. While in the previous order humans subsisted on hunting, gathering and horticulture, in the current one they started agriculture and breeding animals. As Bohnenberger argues, the loss of local crop cultivation – together with other changes, including religious conversion – is connected with poverty, ill-being and conflict, alarming signs that a new cosmic transformation lies ahead.

Other articles in this collection describe various factors that contribute to changes in cultivation and diet, in particular the role of the state in managing and regulating resources, including cultural practices. For instance, from the seventeenth century the Alawite monarchy in Morocco consolidated its rule by providing food (read: wheat) security, and since independence in particular flour (*fors*) has become a completely state-controlled commodity. The prices of low-quality flour are kept so low that buying cheap bread is economically more advantageous than making one's own bread. Nevertheless, as has been pointed out above, as a resource making one's own bread is so important that even the poorest follow the practice at times. In Mexico too maize cultivation, according to Bohnenberger, has declined partly as result of the government encouraging cattle-breeding, while the Indian government has created 'rice citizens', as Hardenberg points out in this collection of papers, alluding to the term 'cereal citizens' coined by Graf in her contribution. The impact of the state has been particularly strong in Central Asia, where, in Soviet times, people were forced to adopt new crops and agricultural

⁸ Vitebsky (2017), personal communication with Peter Berger

methods. Rice was introduced and soon became a marker of regional identity. Soviet rule also had a sustained influence on religious practices, as the 'new farmers' avoided 'superstition'. As a result, for example, the status of Bobo-yi Dehqon changed in some places from that of patron saint to that of a mere skilled farmer. Male-dominated rituals disappeared more completely as the state exerted its firm grip on the male-dominated public domain. Gender roles changed accordingly, and men became the cooks of certain types of food (e.g., *palov* and *sumalak*) that were eaten on public occasions and in restaurants. For the post-Soviet period Dağyeli describes the nationalisation of heritage, with the Navruz festival becoming a national holiday, a process in which cereals play an important part. What these examples of state intervention show is that cereals are a resource whereby governments may win or remain in power by manipulating the basic livelihoods of their citizens. However, despite all the pressures and changing circumstances, Dağyeli argues that wheat managed to remain crucial and highly valued in Central Asia, partly because of its embeddedness in ritual practices and sacred narratives. We have here an example of 'radical continuity', which may be contrasted with cases of 'radical change' (Robbins 2007), such as the complete abandonment of millet and ancestor worship among the Sora described elsewhere by Vitebsky (2017).

The role of the state, though surely crucial, should not be exaggerated. Dağyeli points out that it is not the Soviet state but the changing economic sphere, including mechanisation and labour relations, that is acting as the most significant trigger of changes in cultivation practices. Such changes include the ritual sphere: for instance, the shift from plough to tractor also involved a switch in divine affiliations, a switch from Gabriel to David, the patron of metal work. Bohnenberger too describes transformations in the spheres of rituals and life-style that are unconnected to state intervention, for example, the ubiquity of cakes for birthday celebrations and of wheat in general in everyday life.

The aim of this collection of papers on 'cereal belongings' is to stimulate further research into the social and cultural dimensions of cereals by highlighting certain recurring phenomena such as the 'personalisation' of crops in diverse ritual systems, the 'competition' between staple grains deriving from internal and external factors, the emergence of 'hierarchies of value' that correlate cereals with social identities and processes of social exclusion ('alterity'), and finally 'conversion' to new diets when, for instance, 'imperial crops' push aside local or 'subaltern' food items. This approach turns cereals into analytical categories, that is, starting points for studying the sorts of socio-cultural dynamics that may lead to radical change in the form of completely new configurations of value, as well as to its opposite, namely radical continuity in the sense of strong and prolonged resistance to the introduction of new values.

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