

Taming Nature, Taming Workers: Constructing the Separation Between Meat Consumption and Meat Production in the U.S

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“The public revolted at the idea of human flesh going into the lard they used, but gave little thought to the human beings, the workers to whom the flesh belonged, and to the slums in which those workers lived” (Corey 1950).

In this article we examine corporate and state actions implicated in manufacturing the extension, and precipitating the collapse, of the fictional distance separating production from consumption in contemporary agro-food systems. We investigate this phenomena via the case of the U.S. beef industry. Specifically, we examine regulatory initiatives, and corporate responses, aimed at addressing the two most important issues confronting the industry today: bacteriological meat contamination and an over-reliance on Latino immigrant labor. The collapse of this precarious architecture can expose the most hidden, and often problematic, linkages between meat consumption and meat production practices.

Meat is a singularly potent site for investigating the process whereby the separation of nature and society, production and consumption, food consumers and food provisioning workers takes place in industrialized food systems. In the United States, meat is a highly industrialized sector. A single meat-packing plant may employ more than 2000 workers and slaughter over 4,000 head of cattle per day. By the latter part of the 19th century, and before Henry Ford assembled his first car, slaughterhouses pioneered the use of the disassembly line which soon became a symbol of this country’s industrial capitalist might. Wealthy industrialists discovered in mass-produced meat a potentially lucrative site for capital accumulation and built their huge slaughterhouses. To complete their profitability formula, packers tapped into networks of European, Black and, eventually, Mexican immigrants whose precarious economic and legal status served as *de facto* mechanisms for disciplining, and thus cheapening, the price of, labor. The virtual lack of governmental regulation of the industry in this area of *laissez faire* capitalism, represented an additional source of ‘primitive accumulation’.

Soon, however, questions surrounding sanitary and working conditions began to

plague this nascent industry, threatening to over-sensitize consumers to the most unsavory aspects of industrialized meat production. As the quote above reveals, it was concerns with food safety, rather than the fate of this largely European immigrant workforce, that captured the public's imagination. The industry has never lost sight of this peculiar response and has labored especially hard to lengthen the material, physical, and symbolic distance between meat production and meat consumption practices. However, the separation between production workers and consumers must be continuously, and often fiercely redrawn, via combinations of technological and ideological devices as well as through the use of power, violence, and coercion. The process is conflict-ridden, highly contingent, and vulnerable to the unexpected emergence of new threats to meat safety and of public, as well as 'workers,' resistance to a whole host of meat-production practices. State intervention has had the contradictory effect of contributing to the industry's survival while further exposing consumers to conditions of meat production.

Today, two unexpected events, once again associated with meat safety and labor issues, threaten to over-expose the problematic linkages between industrialized meat production and meat consumption. One is the increase in food-borne diseases linked to the presence of new pathogens such as *E. coli* O157:H7 in under-cooked hamburger meat. The other event has to do with an increasingly organized resistance from anti-immigrant forces against the industry's employment of an often undocumented Latino immigrant labor force. The various linkages connecting these two events remain ambiguously defined. Some analysts and media journalists suggest a logical connection between bacteriological contamination in meatpacking plants and the employment of unskilled immigrant labor working at extremely high speeds (Juska et al. 2000). Other, and even less obvious linkages, are those emerging out of the regulatory process related aimed at addressing these two 'problems'. In both cases, it is the application of sophisticated surveillance technologies and generous discursive and ideological resources that undergird their 'solution'.

We argue that corporate and state strategies to address these dual challenges and their complex linkages can undermine, but ultimately reproduce, the production/consumption divide. Albeit the latter rests on an increasingly unstable socio-political plane. To examine this claim, we focus on two U.S. government regulatory initiatives and accompanying strategies of resistance. The first of these regulatory initiatives is Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points, or HACCP as it is commonly called. HACCP was designed to enhance meat safety regulations inside packing plants and in the face of a rising number of bacteriological infection outbreaks. The second initiative, 'Operation Prime Beef', later re-named 'Operation Vanguard', was launched by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) responding to public pressures to eliminate meatpacking as a powerful 'magnet' for undocumented workers. All of the forty plus meatpacking plants located in Nebraska, and a few in Iowa, two U.S. Midwestern states, were considered as pilot sites for what was supposed to become an industry-wide immigrant labor regulation initiative across the United States.

State efforts to introduce new regulatory requirements in meatpacking plants, especially in the current neoliberal climate, are met with intense resistance by meat corporations - often successfully. Recent examples include the rescinding of new

ergonomic standards by the Bush administration's, and the weakening of workers' compensation laws which undermines injured workers rights to compensation (Schlosser 2001) We identify the two principal strategies of resistance utilized by packers to minimize the impact of HACCP and Vanguard. The first consists in the mobilization of economic and political resources in order to alter, if not the design, the implementation of these two initiatives—and to do so in ways that help reassert packers' private control over nature and workers, as well as preserve the fictional separation between production and consumption

The second strategy of resistance involves efforts to establish hegemonic dominance over definitions of meat safety and consumer interests. These definitions are re-framed in increasingly narrow and individualistic terms, often reduced to the question of gastronomic choices. References to consumer/worker collective interests regarding, for example, the impact of industrialized production practices on workers, animals, or the environment are bracketed out.

Increased corporate power to mold and re-mold production and consumption relations and regulatory initiatives is an undeniable fact in contemporary capitalism. But so is the fact that these regulatory activities, the public debates that often surround them, and the increasingly dense and politicized networks they engender, also serve to mobilize social actors interested in alternative food provisioning systems. While much is being made of the end of production politics, organizing around issues of meat are likely to take place along the horizontal, as well as vertical, lines criss-crossing issues of consumption and production. Mobilization around meat safety in the U.S., for example, has galvanized consumer groups made up mostly of non-Hispanic whites (Juska et al. 2000). Mobilization around production issues, on the other hand, is experiencing an upsurge led by Latino groups, often in collaboration with non-Latino workers and immigration advocates. Unionization, the quintessential production-based politics, is a growing trend in meatpacking plants where documented and non-documented immigrants lead the way and around which organization to address non-production issues such as lack of health care and poor housing in minority neighborhoods are emerging (Bacon 2000). We return briefly to this issue in the article's conclusion.

In the next section we outline the theoretical insights guiding our examination of the meat industry and regulatory efforts and counter-efforts implicated in the construction of the production/consumption divide. We proceed with the actual examination of our empirical cases and conclude with some final thoughts about the future of the consumption and production divide and the politics of food.

Theoretical Framework

Our analysis is informed by an eclectic combination of Political Economy and Post-Structuralist insights relevant to the question of how production and consumption become separated in the elaboration of contemporary agrofood systems. Consumption and production, in our view, are analytically and historically linked processes underpinning social reproduction at its most fundamental level. The otherwise fictional separation between these two spheres is an artifact of power and socio-cultural as well as ideological construction. The inherent tension between unity and separation is, therefore, embedded in the particular social relations and

attendant class formation processes which characterize different historical eras. Their unity (technological, economic, institutional, political and socio-cultural aspect of food production and consumption) is most evident in pre-market societies. Their separation, or dis-embeddeness, as the writings of Marx (1977, 1972) Durkheim (1947), and Polanyi (2001) imply, is inherently conflictual, often brutal, and not exactly self-reproducing. A wide of array of economic and extra-economic mechanisms must be continuously mobilized to sustain it.

Agrofood scholars working from a variety of post-structuralist approaches have critiqued Marxist political-economy's tendency to assign theoretical primacy to production and the labor process while failing to take consumption as well as nature seriously (Warde 1996; Busch and Juska 1997; Lockie and Kitto 2000; Goodman 2001; Whatmore 2002). Marx (1977) clearly understood that production and consumption are intricately related processes. This is evidenced in his analysis of use versus exchange value as the constitutive elements of commodities. As Antonio (2003, p. 28) points out, Marx recognized that there was a whole other side to the commodity he was at least temporarily bracketing in his analysis of capitalism. This was the commodity's qualitative properties which, should we study them seriously, much 'commercial' knowledge could be gained about how consumption practices are elaborated in and by the market. But it was the quantitative side of the commodity or exchange, and more precisely, the social relations of production concealed behind such commodity exchange, that interested him. He lived to expose the exploitation of workers which he argued tended to vanish deep inside our fetishised products of consumption. And he hoped to derive emancipatory possibilities from the same productive relations.

Political economists of food an agriculture following on Marx's food steps, critiques argue, fail to explore alternative forms of domination and agency associated with the consumption side of the equation. Marxist Critical Theory approaches certainly represent an effort to deal with these blind spots, given their emphasis on cultural and ideological domination. But they hardly abandon their focus on the sphere of production (Bonanno and Constance 2001)

Support for elevating consumption to an analytical status a la par, or even above that, of production can be partially found in analyses of economic globalization and restructuring underscoring the 'post-Fordist' features of contemporary capitalism. The concentration of workers in de-collectivized service industries or decentralized symbolic occupations, the preponderance of contingent work and flexible arrangements, and the diminished power of unions are important tendencies pointing, for example, toward the erosion of production-based politics and class-based political consciousness (Harvey 1990). Instead, students of consumption argue, it is in this sphere where our identities and mobilizational impulses are largely constituted today. Consumers emerge as actors with newfound agency and consumption, rather than production, as the more relevant site from which we develop 'reflexive' capacities to challenge socially-fragmenting institutional arrangements (Crompton 1996).

Despite Marx's blind spots, his analytical choice parallels our concern with exposing relations of production in the meat industry and the exploitation of immigrant workers which remain occluded in meat consumption. We propose, as a heuristical device to facilitate the comparative analyses of these highly complex

regulatory efforts and their consequences. This consists of the articulation of two analytical distinct moments in the separation of meat consumers and meat producers. The first moment hinges on the continuous proletarianization and marginalization of displaced communities of labor engendered by the restructuring processes outlined above, and from which meat processing companies ultimately benefit. In their displacement, and concomitant racialization, those who harvest, process, and cook our food become physically as well as economically and ethnically separated, from the majority of those who consume these industrial foods. As suggested earlier, battles fought among corporations, states, and communities over immigrant workers and resulting immigration enforcement efforts, contribute to this separation. Although, as we illustrate in our Vanguard case study, these battles may also open unexpected spaces for agency and resistance resulting from social networks mobilized by these same regulatory initiatives.

The articulation of a second moment in the separation of consumption and production draws from post-structuralist insights and occurs within the sphere of consumption proper. It is accomplished via the unprecedented deployment, by densely constituted industry networks, of elaborate imagineries about culinary cultures, food purchasing experiences, and consumption practices. In these imaginaries, the less palatable conditions of production are concealed. Production has, of course, not 'withered away'. The contradictions posed by mass production of perishable products and the need to employ masses of workers dispossessed of citizenship and other legal rights, are never at a totally safe distance from consumers. As suggested earlier, breakdowns in meat safety regimes and resultant efforts by the state to increase regulation of the meat industry, mobilizes corporate strategies of resistance. But they also tend to heighten, and maybe even result from, consumer mobilization around issues of food safety and precipitate the collapse of the production/consumption divide. To what extent resistance at the consumption level becomes a platform for broad-based and culturally inclusive emancipatory, ovements capable of re-linking concerns over consumption and production relations via democratic structures of participation, will depend on a whole host of historical and contingent factors.

Insights from post-structuralist, relational, approaches such as Actor-network theory, (ANT), are particularly useful at this place in our proposed analytical framework ANT rejects the a-priori conceptualization of forces determining the separation and linkages between consumption and production, nature and society (Latour 1993; Murdoch 1997; Law and Hassard 1999; Lockie and Kitto 2000). Its methodology directs us to view social agency as the outcome of social networks' performative capacity to align hybrid entities and social relations into common projects of 'translation' (Goodman 2001). This is consistent with our view that regulatory and counter-regulatory regimes associated with meat safety and the control of immigrant workers emerge out of highly contingent strategies and unexpected performances of interlocking and divergent networks of 'humans and non-humans'. These action networks may include industry managers, scientists, INS officials, meatpacking workers, live bacteria, surveillance technologies, and consumers. Their ultimate configuration and success depends largely on the capacity of these perennially metamorphosing networks to enroll other strategically situated actors into common 'translations' and visions, including their capacity to

defeat alternative visions or translations.

However, we introduce two caveats to the application of ANT's approach to our particular case studies. First, ANT's highly seductive metaphors of 'translation' and 'enrollment' tend to underscore the negotiated dimension of networks while downplaying those of power and violence which undergird meat consumption and production relations in the U.S. We employ 'taming' as an alternative metaphor that more accurately captures the coercive nature of disciplining technologies deployed by corporate and state agents to manufacture consent among humans and non-humans. Our intent is not to over-compensate for ANT's unsatisfactory treatment of the power dimension, by downplaying these 'hybrid' networks capacities to resist these coercive strategies. On the contrary, we simultaneously reaffirm the value of ANT's insight that agency is the outcome of social networks and thus highly contingent. Unexpected events, such as the emergence of new pathogens, for example, may trigger taming technologies. But nature, as ANT reminds us, is not passive and industries are always at least one step behind in predicting its next move--some of which are unexpectedly triggered by the taming process itself. Similarly, as David Harvey (1998; 2000, pp. 102-103) points out, capital only partially controls labor as the latter participates in the process of production in two ways: as human bodies and as labor power. Taming represents the extension of violence in the process of surplus value extraction, but as human bodies/persons and subjectivities, workers—even undocumented immigrant workers—possess will and capacity to resist.

Our second caveat refers to ANT's tendency to over-compensate for political economy's blind spots by creating some of its own and, in the process, betraying its relational approach. This includes an emphasis on agency while erasing the historical-specific economic arrangements and configurations of power within which such agency is engendered (Gouveia 1997; Araghi and McMichael 2000; Buttel 2001; Friedland 2001). Meatpacking restructuring, and the meat industry's efforts to suborn regulatory regimes, may unexpectedly engender, yet ultimately constrain agency aimed at protecting the environment or workers' rights or transacting the ethno-racial divide in the politics of food.

Taming Workers, Taming Nature: Two Moments in the Separation of Meat Consumption and Meat Production in the U.S.

In this section we employ the proposed heuristic tool suggesting a double movement in the separation of consumption and production. We look at: 1) how meat processing workers become separated from community and consumers at various points in time and 2) how such separation is enhanced by the manipulation of symbolic cultures of food and the legitimacy drawn from the ideological dominance of neoliberalism and its ode to individual choice.

Taming Workers: Regulating Immigrant Labor, Vanguard and the Fetishism of Meat Production

By the 1970s a major restructuring wave in the meat industry was becoming evident (Stull et al. 1995; Broadway 1995; Epstein 2001; Brueggemann and Brown

2002).¹ The re-ordering of the meat production complex was the result of corporate strategies aimed at regaining average profit margins which had begun to decline as old plants failed to modernize and competition from other meats was severely affecting beef consumption. By the 1980s, a new breed of plants led by IBP, together with ConAgra's Momfort, and Cargill's Excel, designed a profit scheme based on automation, reconstitution of nature (animals and animal products), increased line speed, a move away from traditional meatpacking urban centers, and the elimination of old union contracts. Particularly important was the sourcing of new immigrant labor forces consolidating as a result of commingling events such as the 1965 immigration legislation which ended country quotas, and the displacement of thousands of Asians and Latinos from war-torn and debt-ravaged regions. The public lashed out at the industry, not unlike it had done in the past, for its monopolistic and unhygienic practices, but tacked on an increasingly loud protest against the immigrants it had brought to their communities which, together, altered their rural tranquility and the geographic and cultural landscapes. These sentiments were reinforced when immigrants were used as strikebreakers in some of the last gasps of union power and staged a number of strikes in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Craypo 1994). Under these conditions, the distance between workers and consumers appear unsurmountable.

U.S. meatpackers reliance on labor from Latin America, particularly from Mexico and, to a lesser extent, Central American countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala, is common knowledge—at least in the U.S. Midwest. Industry journals, the media, and academic researchers alike routinely report Latino packing plant workforces upwards of 70 percent (See for example *Meat and Poultry* various issues; Gouveia and Saenz 2000; Schlosser 2001). The reason is also well-known. New immigrant labor streams and ethnic network recruitment represent a variety of savings to employers ranging from decreased demands for cheaper wages and better benefits, to lower recruitment and reproduction costs.

Maintaining access to this labor supply is a process riddled with conflict. Frequent reports on higher-than average meatpacking injury rates and workplace abuses, the hiring of 'illegal aliens' to perform jobs 'no-one else wants'; or rural community protestations over the plants' real or imagined impact on their 'way of life,' complicate as well as harden corporate efforts to occlude the realities of the production process lurking behind the 'price of a good stake' (Stull and Broadway 1995) Employers must preserve enough control over workers' bodies and movements to maintain desired line speeds without risking higher than acceptable turnover rates, or mobilization from advocates and opponents of immigrant workers alike.

Historically, packers have enrolled state agents and, wittingly or unwittingly, benefitted from xenophobic sentiments in order to secure access to, and control over, this low-wage labor flow. Today, industrial organizations such as the American Meat Institute mobilize enormous discursive and material resources to lobby for immigration laws and regulatory practices favorable to these aims. However, such practices also antagonize opposing forces which make competing demands on the state for strengthening immigration controls. INS' decision to exercise new mechanisms for 'Interior Enforcement Policy', (Vanguard) at the same time that packers are complaining—not entirely without reason - about a tight labor market,

demonstrate the contingent nature of these industry-based social networks. By the same token, the scrutiny of packers' hiring practices often leads to the even less welcome scrutiny over their overall production practices.

Community Anxieties as Trigger for Work-Place Immigration Enforcement

The increased saliency of Latino workers in overwhelmingly white rural towns hosting new or refurbished meatpacking plants has refueled moral panics about 'the other'. These anxieties are often confounded and conflated with genuine concerns over environmental and economic impacts of meatpacking plants on their host communities (Gouveia and Stull 1995). An Iowa resident expresses these entangled views thus: "It is not racism," he says, rather, "the constant churn and burn of employees produces a certain type of ex-employee and in turn this creates a certain type of personnel profile for the recruitment of future employees—not the long-term, community-oriented person, but just a stranger passing through. Who in their right mind would want 20 percent of their community consisting of transients?" (Letter to the editor of *Meat and Poultry*, April 2001). Others are more explicit in their unproblematic generalization of immigrants as criminals: "This town is ruined since the Mexicans came. It used to be that you could leave your car unlocked or your children's bicycle on the front yard. These people don't even take care of their lawn" (Gouveia fieldnotes, June 2000)

Americans' increasing discomfort with the current demographic shift weighed heavily on INS's decision to come up with a plan to restore 'Public safety', in rural areas threatened by the increase of 'criminal aliens'. In his testimony to congress, given to seek approval of the new Interior Enforcement policy, Bob Bach, a former immigration sociologist, turned Executive Associate Commissioner of INS testified that:

"Changing patterns of immigration...have greatly increased concerns among local residents and law enforcement officials in areas that have not had much experience with this phenomenon. Of special concern has been the impact of criminal alien activity, unauthorized employment of illegal aliens and of the movement of smuggled aliens along interior transportation routes on the economy and quality of life in these local communities" (Testimony of to the House Immigration and Claims Subcommittee, July, 1, 1999)

In September 1998, for the first time in the history of the agency, INS targeted an entire industry for a work-based law enforcement action. Nebraska was chosen as the pilot site, along with a few bordering Iowa communities. By April 1999, Operation Vanguard had begun its implementation phase. 'Big Three' (IBP, now Tyson, Cargill and ConAgra) executives, and small plant owners alike, were herded into a hotel room filled with media and community representatives. They were handed boxes containing the letters summoning employees identified for 'discrepancies' among various forms of identification. A total of 4,500, out of 24,000 Nebraska and Iowa meatpacking workers were identified as having such 'discrepancies' (i.e., were suspected of working illegally). Some companies had up to 68 percent of their employees called in for INS interviews.

The action was advertised widely by INS as a new approach to workplace

enforcement. According to their public relations campaign, this would, first of all, signal to the public at large, and workers in particular, that enforcement actions would no longer be confined to the US-Mexican border and INS would pursue workers all the way into the interior of the country. Second, raids, the most common approach to workforce enforcement, up to this time, were now deemed ineffective in removing the job magnet. The new approach would rely instead on sophisticated information technologies used to cross-reference INS data bases with other federal and state data bases (particularly social security and drivers' licence). From this time forward, all employee records deemed to be working illegally, would be monitored on a quarterly basis, supposedly making it impossible for them to return to any of the plants included in the data base. If the pilot proved successful, the new approach to enforcement would be extended, first to the entire meat and poultry industry, and then to service and other jobs where immigrants concentrate: "They are not going to be able to get a job" (INS Acting Director, cited in Hendee 1999). Finally, and as one of the first indications of INS backtracking its draconian operation under alternative sources of public and corporate pressures, INS re-articulated what had been a unilateral operation as one to be undertaken in 'collaborative partnerships' among its agents, corporations and the community.

This localized version of the Interior Enforcement policy, i.e, Vanguard was, as also legitimized as a response to pressures coming from rural communities' law enforcement officers and thousands of constituents calls to congressional delegations. One of the main authors of Interior Enforcement and Operation Vanguard explained to one of us: "Operation Vanguard was born out of a meeting of minds" between his office and elected officials from Nebraska. His office, he said, "was interested in ways to eliminate the magnet of jobs for undocumented workers," while congressional representatives were interested in "responding to their constituencies' concerns over the connection between a growing number of immigrants in their community and crime" (Gouveia interview with official from the INS Dallas Regional Office, April 1999).

By stirring latent and overt racist and xenophobic sentiments underpinning this association between Latinos and immigrants, INS officials were convinced they could enroll community and political support for this novel enforcement action: The acting Director of INS was an eloquent spokesman for the cause: "In small meatpacking communities with large numbers of undocumented workers, crime is up, as are demands for public services, bilingual education and other programs. Communities are crying for a 'get tough attitude' on undocumented workers" (Ruggles 1998). However, in conversations with these officials and public forums, they also brought up the issue of worker exploitation as a legitimating reason for going after the industry and thus as a way of also enrolling pro-immigrant voices. The link between workers and consumers (community others) was complete, and the distance between production and consumption had been effectively shortened through the public debates and massive mobilization of technologies and discourses surrounding this regulatory initiative.

Unexpected Contestations

Despite INS efforts to respond to what they interpreted – whether truthfully or not – as community pressure for enhanced regulation of immigrant workers, the

level of resistance that emerged from various segments of the community was not anticipated. Industry, local government officials and the Latino community joined forces for the first time to oppose Vanguard. The Latino community called the operation 'racist'. Its leaders and allies met with congressional delegations, also for the first time, and got them to withdraw their support for, or deny that they had ever supported, Vanguard. The governor of the state convened meetings and public forums and convened an investigative commission composed of industry and community representatives. As he and others expected, the commission's report overwhelmingly condemned Vanguard and INS began a process of quick retreat from this new *modus operandi* (INS Enforcement Taskforce Report 2000; Reed 2000).

The state's efforts to regulate the flow of immigrant workers toward meatpacking plants generated new contradictions, network realignments, and accommodations which have strong implications for the continuously contested process of construction and re-construction of consumption and production relations in the current context of global competition. On the one hand, the industry's production process stood rather naked and betrayed efforts to de-link meat from the workers that produce it and the conditions under which they produce it. While cattle feeders worried about livestock oversupply problems if Vanguard succeeded in removing line workers from processing plants, packers worried about their 'tarnished image' and the operation's impact on their ambiguously stated notion of 'consumer confidence'. Importantly, the spotlight shined on these packers opened the door for unprecedented grassroots mobilization to denounce working conditions, forcing the Governor to order a parallel investigation of these conditions. This time, the report led to the even more unprecedented move by a Republican Governor to draft a 'Meatpacking Workers Bill of Rights' which he ordered, in the midst of fierce packer opposition, to post at the entrance of each meatpacking plant in Nebraska. The first salvo on this document is a recognition of the right of workers to organize. This inspired progressive state senators to join this mobilization drive and a bill was passed to assign someone in the Department of Labor to monitor packers' compliance with the Bill of Rights. Vanguard was effectively stopped as a result of these mobilizational efforts (Hendee 2002). Most workers targeted by Vanguard, who had left their employment in fear of being apprehended, tricked back into town and within weeks, if not days, were back at their job. INS moved on to Missouri and occasionally launches a showy enforcement action to appease the re-emergence of community anxieties over too many immigrants.

Clearly, at the end, INS enforcement actions served to 'lengthen' industry networks and reinforce, rather than weaken, packers' access to its much needed supply of Latino immigrant labor. Discourses about the victimization of a whole industry and its workers by INS led to increased privatization of immigration functions via packers' liberal access to the highly coveted 'software' that INS used to cross-check documents with national and state data bases. The Governor of Iowa publically supported the deployment of another component of INS' interior enforcement policy in his state, the Quick Response Teams (QRTs) which would work closely with local police and sheriffs departments to quell the community anxieties such as those which triggered Vanguard. In exchange, INS established 'Historic' agreements with companies such as IBP. In addition, and most

importantly, the action and resistance strategies by packers and their political allies, fueled a new round of support for including packers in guest-worker visa programs for which they had been ineligible (These are only applicable to jobs considered seasonal). Today, packers have quietly begun to access these visa programs and the number of workers laboring under these historically unprotected legal frameworks are unknown.

Packer, local states, and community interests converged, only to diverge again over the legalization question. Not surprisingly, packers favor guest-worker-type legislation while Latino community advocates and their allies demand full amnesty. In his negotiations with President Bush, Mexico's President, Vicente Fox, reluctantly accepted a guest-worker program as possibly the only way to protect the flow of immigrant remittances which today represent Mexico's third largest source of income—behind oil and tourism. The events of September 11th, however, have all but eliminated the possibility of amnesty or any such program that guarantees immigrant workers equal rights. To wit, the U.S. Supreme Court has just ruled that undocumented immigrant workers are not entitled to restitutions when fired illegally by employers seeking to undermine union organization campaigns.

Operation Vanguard can be viewed then as a set of practices and discourses which ultimately contributed to the historical devaluation of immigrant workers' role in feeding U.S. consumers. Unlike the wholesome and virtuous farmers profiled in the cooking shows with whom consumers can readily identify and trust, immigrants are reduced to the status of 'illegal aliens', and thus devoid of identity, history, and humanity. Vanguard is heralded by immigration experts as the final solution. This reaffirmation of public imagineries of immigrant labor as 'aliens' contributes to the aforementioned bracketing of relations of production from the meat regulation polices. Instead, the entire array of problematic issues implicated in the relations of production are transformed into issues of managing and controlling illegal aliens. While packers were extremely angered by Vanguard, they have been relatively successful at re-translating the problem of immigrant labor into the problem of lack of labor which, they argue, can only be solved by transforming Mexico into their temporary employment agency.

Control over workers' 'bodies' may be most blatantly expressed in the organization of work and mechanisms of intensive surveillance inside meatpacking plants. However, just as important are new policy and enforcement efforts to restrain immigrant workers' movements and rights in the communities—and nation-- where they reside. Nevertheless, Vanguard did serve to engender new agency among pro-labor constituencies, and it was indeed their collective actions which stopped Vanguard on its tracks, at least in their original version (Reed 2000). We now move on to our second moment in the separation of production and consumption.

Taming Nature: Meat Regulations, HACCP, and the Fetishism of Consumption

The meat regulation framework established by the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act, remained mostly unchanged up until 1996 when it was replaced by the Pathogen Reduction Act. Regulations established at the beginning of the last century focused mostly on conditions of collectivized meat consumption by emphasizing safety (sanitation and adequate hygienic conditions

of meat production, distribution, and trade as guaranteed by USDA inspectors located inside meatpacking plants) as well as facilitating economic policies that would facilitate the growth of meat production and consumption (Skaggs 1986).

By the late 1970s the industry was experiencing significant upheaval as old line packers declined and a new breed of packers, especially IBP, are entering the field. In the midst of a profit squeeze, packers focused increasingly on the costs of regulations, particularly of the meat safety regime established at the beginning of the last century, which they argued had become anachronistic. Ironically, one of the factors impinging upon packers' profits were growing health concerns among consumers and correlate declines in beef consumption.

Meatpacking restructuring was supported with ideological discourses aimed at decreasing the costs of regulation and, in the process, effectively redrawing the boundaries between production and consumption. Packers argued that meat processing practices should no longer be subjected to public regulation and the daily presence of USDA inspectors inside meatpacking plants was unnecessary, costly and akin to 'big brother' tactics (Bjerklie 1995). Instead, they proposed, regulation should be left to 'the market'. Decisions made by individual consumers, they went on to argue, have been much more effective in imposing discipline and safety regulations on the industry, than the highly bureaucratized government agencies. During the 1970s and 80s, consumption was also being redefined via marketing campaigns in increasingly individualized terms that also cohered with the rising dominance of neoliberal discourses. Instead of assurance of safety and plentitude of meat for the whole population, consumption was recast as freedom of choice and value for the consumer (e.g. increasing portions, convenience, efficiency, and decreasing price) The adage from the Burger King commercial summarized it best: "Your way right away at the Burger King now!"

Breaching the Neo-liberal Production/Consumption Divide: E. coli O157:H7

The rise to prominence of the neo-liberal critique of the government's role in food regulation and an increasing emphasis on individualized consumer behavior in policy debates did not, of course, mean that production practices had somehow 'withered away'. The thin veil draped over such problematic relations was suddenly and unexpectedly lifted by events taking place during the early 1980s. The country experienced a dramatic increase in the incidence of foodborne diseases caused by the so-called 'new foodborne pathogens' such as *E. coli* O157:H7, *Salmonella*, *Campobacter*, and other pathogens (Altekruse and Swerdlow 1996; Tauxe 1997). The spread of new foodborne diseases began to raise questions about the causes of food contamination which, in turn, led to increasing scrutiny of meat production practices.

Especially important in breaching the ideological separation between production and consumption were controversies associated with *E. coli* O157:H7 found in undercooked beef (Council for Agricultural Science and Technology 1994; Tarr 1994; Armstrong et al. 1996). This strain of bacteria can be present in the intestines of cattle and spreads easily during process of beef processing (Sheridan 1998). If meat is not cooked properly *E. coli* O157:H7 can cause dangerous infections.

Despite these rising concerns, the industry was buffered by the de-regulatory and impulses of the conservative administrations of Presidents Reagan and Bush and

effectively resisted pressures to implement updated methods of meat inspection (Schlosser 2001). Aided by an increasingly meatpacking-friendly USDA appointees, packers re-translated the scientific community's concerns about outdated organoleptic inspection methods (those based on inspector's visual inspection) to increase their demand for removal of these inspectors from the plants (Juska et al. 2000, Schoesser 2001)

Concerns about *E. coli* O157:H7's threat to public health rose significantly after the 1993 outbreak at Jack-in-the-Box restaurants in the western United States. This was one of the largest foodborne disease outbreaks in recent decades to, almost overnight, expose the problematic aspects of meat production practices and their link to human consumption. Not since Sinclair's publishing of *The Jungle* in 1906, has the meat industry's meat safety practices been subjected to such scrutiny by the mass media, politicians, professionals of various fields of medicine, and the public at large. The 1993 Jack-in-the-Box outbreak revealed the volatility of artificially-constructed production-consumption distance, expressed as well as constituted by regulatory regimes premised on individualistic constructions of consumers. In a very short period of time, these very same consumers turned to the government demanding collective freedom from contaminated meat.

Negotiating New Production/Consumption Boundaries

The highly contested nature of borders between production and consumption were expressed in a confusion regarding definitions of what constitutes safe meat, who is to blame for meat contamination's and how should meat safety be assured.² Industry representatives fiercely resisted opening up production practices for public scrutiny and regulation. They argued that *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreaks were caused not by deficiencies in meat processing, but by mistakes made by individuals in the process of meat handling and preparation (see for example, Zottola and Smith 1990; Gants 1999).

Consumer, animal welfare and farmer activists, epidemiologists, veterinary doctors, and some government officials on the other hand, rejected these individualist explanations and instead blamed the rise in foodborne disease outbreaks on institutional failures associated with production (Juska et al. 2000). From their perspective, the role of the public in defining what constituted sound animal farming and meat processing practices, needed to be reinstated. In this context, environmentalists and animal welfare proponents argued against confinement of animals in large-scale facilities and the excessive use of pharmaceuticals which, research suggested, contributed to the spread of dangerous bacteria in the meat supply (Animal Welfare Institute 1987; Eisnitz 1997). Epidemiologists on their part, claimed that an increasingly consolidated and industrialized meat industry had become a potent vehicle for spreading bacteriological contaminations (Garrett 1994, Ch 13; Rhodes 1997, Ch 13). And consumer groups such as Safe Tables is Our Priority, together with health advocates, argued that deregulation of the meat industry during the 1980s contributed to the rise of bacteriological meat contamination (Heersink 1996).

By 1994, USDA could no longer ignore public pressure and declared *E. coli* O157:H7 an adulterant, thus triggering a new debate on meat safety regulation. The government's move appeared to signal a turn away from neoliberal agendas

favoring less rather than more regulation. This simultaneously implied the redrawing of production-consumption boundaries whereby production practices were re-incorporating into definitions of meat safety, also re-defined as a collective, rather than an individual, right. To the surprise of no one, the meatpacking industry challenged USDA's decision to classify *E. coli* O157:H7 as an adulterant and introduce new meat safety regulations. In 1994, the industry filed a lawsuit to stop USDA from conducting bacteriological testing on ground beef. The court ruled in favor of USDA and cleared the way for HACCP (Federal Register 1994).

HACCP and Reconstitution of Production/Consumption Divide

Aware that continuous litigation could produce an even more serious consumer backlash, hardening the public's perception that this was an industry driven by greed rather than concern for consumer safety and health, packers did not appeal the final court's ruling. The industry had also failed to enroll consumers and other key actors into their version of a 'responsible consumer' In an economy and culture oriented towards satisfying consumers, a call for consumer responsibility was highly unpopular. Even if the meat industry had won the legal case against bacteriological testing, this could not have prevented the introduction of this type of approach to meat safety by the fast food chains and supermarkets. Had they done so, this would have been to the disadvantage of meatpackers struggling to present their industry as the true representatives of consumer interests, *vis-à-vis* fast food chains and supermarkets.

Although the USDA's court victory appeared to represent a return to a collectivized version of consumption and production practices, given the refusal of the USDA to allow individual plants and the market to define what was safe, the definition of meat safety remained highly contested. This occurred in part because, having won the right to conduct bacteriological testing, the USDA still fell far short of the power it needed to regulate processing. Furthermore, the USDA needed the industry's cooperation, as well as support from Congress, to have the new Pathogen Reduction Act signed into law and introduce bacteriological meat regulations in meat processing plants.

At the end, social networks and power relations were realigned to force a compromise, codified in the new Pathogen Reduction Act of 1996, or HACCP, whereby consumer and health advocates won the battle for the introduction of bacteriological meat safety regulations, but packers were given wide discretion regarding their implementation. Under HACCP, the USDA's federal meat inspection authority in meat processing plants was significantly reduced. Its major function became that of verifying records generated by line workers, chosen by packers, to monitor conditions that may lead to the spread of bacteria inside the plants.

The passage of the Pathogen Reduction Act amounted to the re-imposition of narrow meat safety definitions which in no way questioned, as advocates hoped, the extent to which meat contamination is integral, not accidental, to a highly industrialized and concentrated industry. Rather than stop the production of contamination, the answer consonant with such profit schemes, was to decontaminate meat via new and expensive technologies, such as carcass rinsing, ozonation, steam pasteurization, steam vacuuming, and irradiation. All of these technologies are directed at taming, or fixing 'nature' rather than 'fixing the system.'

Since only the biggest producers can afford such expensive technologies, HACCP has a potential to further promote consolidation (Kay 1998; Anonymous 1999).

There are limits to which this hyper-intensification of meat processing can be portrayed as consonant with consumers' demand for food 'safety'. These limits were revealed in the retailers' as well as consumers' reluctance to buy irradiated meat despite USDA's approval and slick marketing campaigns by the American Meat Institute, designed to encourage consumption of 'electronically pasteurized meat'. The introduction of these potent technological weapons against bacteria, however, have the un-intended effect of raising new questions among consumers about how meat became contaminated in the first place and to such extent that irradiation becomes the only solution. This opens new opportunities for transacting the distance between production and consumption and mobilization efforts toward more sustainable meat production systems. What is less certain is the extent to which consumers would link their concerns for meat safety with those of workers' safety. Or if they do, will they blame those 'illegal aliens' potentially viewed as having 'questionable hygienic habits' themselves, rather than the more elusive and hard to document systemic features of today's meat production system, for their contaminated meat? The last section outlines how food as lifestyle illustrates both, the constructed separation of production and consumption via ideological manipulation, and the extent to which these increasingly elaborate cultural industries can be called into service by the meat industry interested in preserving this separation—especially in the midst of food scares.

Food as Identity and Lifestyle

"The appearance of slaughterhouses in the mass media is largely restricted to the occasional item concerning legal regulations, and even then the ugliness of death is only rarely depicted...We pay others to carry out the task from which most of us would shrink if confronted, banishing their activity to sites on the margins of our settlements. The low status afforded to slaughterhouse operatives in the social pecking order reflects our common distaste for a process which we nonetheless mandate through consumer demand" (Fiddes 1991).

While the globalization literature has documented the distancing between production and consumption sites and practices, the recent explosion of books, articles, and programing on cooking aims at a reintegration of food production into consumption with the help of selective ideological discourses and marketing practices. Cooking shows and magazines, for example, are full of imagery of small rustic farms, as well as stories profiling cooking shows hosts personal relationships with 'their' farmers, animals and land. Listeners, readers and viewers are educated about farms and the farmers' personal histories, their work and lifestyles, animal reproduction cycles, and processes involved in food production and preparation. Shows such as *'From Martha's Kitchen'* with Martha Stewart or *'Wolfgang Puck Show'* are in part filmed on the farms, including farms in foreign countries (i.e. *'Molto Mario'* is filmed in Italy and in the other parts of Europe).

Hosts bring in fresh produce and fresh meat directly from the farm or country markets to the studio where, unlike the supermarkets were most of us shop, buying

and selling represents a personalized relationships with 'their farmer(s) or 'their butchers'. A recent fad in menus at upper scale restaurants or recipe selections in cooking journals emphasizes seasonal and locally available foods. Allegedly, this re-linking of production and consumption encourages appreciation for, and expands our knowledge of, locally produced foods, which had been reduced, during the supermarket era, to shopping skills and fast-cooking tips.

However, the reintegration of production and consumption in the popular mass media is a highly selective endeavor and remains largely confined to the realm of lifestyles and cooking fads. Its aim is to resist the saliency of consumer activism demanding 'a return' to pre-industrial food systems and threatening to re-expose meat's symbolic ambiguities. These food culture elaborating efforts thus contribute to the fetishism of consumption and reproduces the distance between today's food consumers and the most marginalized food producers.

The cooking-show viewer would be hard-pressed to spot even the slightest glimpse of an industrial farm of tens of thousands of acres, equipped with massive machinery run by computers and satellites. Nor will she or he see the 30,000-strong pig confining facilities from where their high quality tenderloin originates, let alone images of immigrants working in dangerous and unglamourously tedious jobs in the fields or inside a meatpacking plants. The food or produce that the overwhelming majority of us buy at the local supermarket, the fruits and vegetables dosed with chemicals and shipped a thousand miles before we buy them, remain largely hidden. No attempt is made to personalize the cooking show hosts' relationship with IBP (now Tyson), the world's most important butcher.

Framing food and cooking as a lifestyle converts the reintegration of production and consumption into a matter of individual choice. Instead of asking how and under what conditions most of the food we consume is produced, 'cooking as a lifestyle' discourse frames the relationship of consumers with producers as a matter of aesthetics, as an extension of consumer freedom - freedom to choose. Large corporations with control over most of the food we eat hardly encourage us to develop personal relationships with our 'own production crews' at the strawberry field or our 'white hat line workers' at our local meat packing plant. On the contrary, massive efforts are devoted to get us attached to, identify with, and develop long-term loyalty to the 'brand'. For his purpose complex and massive social technologies are deployed so that brand/image (i.e., 'Lean Generation Pork' by Smithfield corporation) becomes separated from its practice (concentrated animal confinement facilities, open lagoons of manure, immigrant workers denied bathroom breaks).

The coexistence of two seemingly contradicting trends - attempts to reify consumption of meat produced within highly industrialized meat subsector and the elaboration and mobilization of consumers to reconstitute production/consumption unity in food as a lifestyle movement - reveals the highly contested and unstable character of the divide between these two realms. This divide is produced by competing ethical and ideological claims (freedom to consume, freedom to choose and other consumer rights vis-à-vis workers' rights or environmental impacts) as well as in struggles over social distinctions, power and profits (class, ethnicity, laws and regulations, institutions that formulate and implement agriculture and food policies, tax regimes, etc.).

Conclusions: Reconstituting the 'New Meat Order' and Redrawing Production/Consumption Boundaries

We have argued that, in the current era of globalization and industrialized food provision systems, consumption and production are equally fetishized and their linkages increasingly occluded. Regulatory discourses and practices, such as those examined here, and currently aimed at the meat industry and its workers, may simultaneously contribute to collapsing the distance separating producers from consumers and enhancing commodity fetishism. In a context of global competitive pressures, massive volumes of processed meat and ever-increasing line speeds underpin the intractable presence of both, bacteriological contamination and the highest injury rates in manufacturing. By translating meat contamination into isolated meatpacking errors, and exploitative relations of production into a problem of 'illegal aliens,' HACCP and Vanguard respectively, protected the main tenets of the meat industry's capital accumulation strategy and partially tore down the walls separating consumers from workers, ultimately threatening those strategies.

Controlling nature and controlling workers in today's environment of global competitiveness and oligopolistic tendencies is neither cheap nor conflict-free. By all accounts expensive HACCP technologies will run smaller slaughterhouses out of business leading to further consolidation of the meat industry (Kay 1998; HACCP Training Center interview 6/28/99; Anonymous 1999a). Maintaining access to un-interrupted flows of cheap immigrant labor in an environment of immigration restrictions and community opposition is equally costly. Packers unable or unwilling to adopt the new technologies of bacteria and immigrant control and re-order their corporate-state relations into 'partnerships' to facilitate increased immigrant worker-surveillance risk additional and more brutal enforcement actions on the part of the state ³.

On the other hand, these re-ordered alliances with the state, and mobilizing new discursive resources, especially after September 11, may also serve the intended or un-intended goal of increasing the pliability of this workforce, partly by reducing their employment options, partly by underscoring their alien-ness and inhibiting the formation of consumer-worker alliances. As consumers continue to demand meat safety and workers increase their demand for work-justice, packers are sure to seek a reordering of networks which does not compromise line speed or their capacity to supply a global market. The success of these strategies hinges on packers capacities to simultaneously navigate the contradictions between mobilizing nativist sentiments and regulatory efforts that can help subordinate but also totally exclude immigrant workers from the plants as unwelcome aliens and tacitly associated with unwelcome bacteria.

The success also hinges on the capacity of key social actor networks to reproduce consumption fetishism by underscoring a consumer choice ethos based on the freedom to consume meat any time the desire arises. Clearly, claims about such enormous consumer power which can, almost at a whim, restructure whole industries are being made at a time when consolidation and concentration in the meat and poultry industry has reached its highest levels in recent history; and when competitive markets, of the kind neo-liberals celebrate, have all but disappeared (Heffernan 1998). Such claims, however, do help elevate a narrowly constructed

consumer (as expansion of his/her choice and increase in consumption) as the fundamental paragon upon which food policy and meat production schemes are built. They reproduce individualized rather than collective visions and inevitably exclude questions about what kind of food system we want, and what are the benefits and overall impacts of such meat production system on the environment, workers, animals, and communities.

The danger of food studies reflecting this consumption turn is that they too may, in the interest of bringing consumption and nature back in, take production relations back out and inadvertently reproduced the neoliberal underpinnings of the current meat order. The danger in narratives emphasizing consumer's rights to choose (safe and quality meat for example) is that they may end up reproducing the highly individualistic construction of consumer choice and the stratifying dimensions that underlay such notions. Choice today is often understood or practiced as the capacity of some, by no means the majority of, consumers to opt out of the mass and lesser-quality meat market and establish 'personal relations' with their local producers and designer butchers.

Post-structuralist approaches, such as ANT, can expose us to relational categories and materialities erased in political-economy approaches. This can, in turn, contribute to the development of new relational ethics and thus the basis of a progressive biopolitics (Goodman 2001). However, we think it is also terribly important to recognize that there is no necessary correlation between increased awareness about food safety, risks, and quality issues and the demand for an egalitarian and truly democratized food production and consumption system.

Finally, it is quite possible that we failed to abandon productionist ontologies in this article. On the other hand, we have tried to take seriously the idea that agency is an outcome of network performances made up of humans and non-humans. That meat-safety technologies, INS helicopters, immigrant data bases, rural town residents, producers, workers, cooking shows and politicians become 'collusive partners' as Goodman refers to them, in the social-natural assemblages that produce problematic separations between production and consumption. We can indeed generate progressive biopolitics and alternative social orderings. However, we believe this involves much more radical realignments of these assemblages and active re-integration of both production and consumption in their fullest sense.

If, for example, if the body, as authors such as Whatmore (2002) contend, is as a 'form of currency of the flesh', a metabolic relation through which we make connections (among producers, consumers, nature), what kinds of connections can we then expect will emerge out of the violated bodies of meatpacking workers and the meat they produce? How do workers and meat eaters metabolize violence, restraint, surveillance, constant fear of exodus through their mutual consumption of meat? How can this common experience help transact the distance between food provisioning workers and consumers; effectively transcending ethnic, racial, nationality and language divides? If there is a relational ethic that undergirds studies highlighting the linkages between the way we treat animals and the way we treat our bodies, can we capitalize on that ethic and extend it to encompass the way we treat displaced peasantries or casualized workers?

Some of the articles in this volume, many of them informed by post-structuralist perspectives, do offer some very important visions about alternative food systems

and social justice that must be seriously considered as potential blueprints for culturally and socially inclusive economic and political projects. The challenge is to envision not simply the substitution of highly industrialized food systems, but the societal reincorporation of the millions of people who have both, been displaced by it, or upon whose exploitation the system is currently maintained.

Notes

- 1 For more in-depth analyses of meatpacking profit squeeze during this period and subsequent restructuring efforts see, for example, Skaggs 1986; Broadway and Ward 1990; Gouveia 1995, and Drabenstott et al. 1999.
- 2 For a detailed analysis of negotiations leading to the development of the new bacteriological meat contamination standards see Juska et. al 2000
- 3 This issue was widely discussed by packers and worker representatives alike during the sessions of the Nebraska Governor's immigration enforcement taskforce. In fact, a few months after Vanguard was no longer operational and INS-Packer partnerships were evoked as the new formula for workplace immigration enforcement, Nebraska Beef, a 'rogue' and rather small packer was raided. Latino workers were deported and Latino managers were indicted on criminal charges for smuggling of illegal aliens.

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