

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Food and Development**

Young, E.M.

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Reviewed by Gillian Hewitson<sup>11</sup>

This is a very timely book. Not only is food exploding as a social science issue, but also food is perhaps the most important development issue, if not global issue, of our time, particularly since, as Young points out, the production and consumption of food has integral links with the petroleum industry (p. 2). This book is well-written and organized. It has extensive documenting of sources, and is in many ways a perfect textbook for courses in food, in development, and in globalisation, and a useful supplement for courses in environment, gender, political economy, geography, politics, and health, amongst others.

The author is a geographer, and like much of modern geography, the book's approach is consistent with a political economy approach: "The current food system has evolved in response to specific historical, political and economic circumstances; it is not a natural system but a socially constructed one which reflects patterns of power and privilege" (p. 1). A major theme is the careful distinction made between proximate and structural causes, and the book examines global, national and local contexts.

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As a textbook, the book begins each chapter with learning outcomes and key concepts, and ends each chapter with a summary of the chapter, discussion questions, further reading, useful websites and follow-up. All of these pre- and post-chapter learning aids are extremely useful for students as well as lecturers. I especially liked the follow-up, which provides ways in which students can deepen their learning on particular aspects of the chapter, but in addition of course ways in which lecturers can extend the student learning by setting assignments around the follow-up items. Within the chapters are short media pieces covering an amazing array of relevant issues, usually very interesting and providing depth to the chapter content. For example, a box on aquaculture supports the section on liberalisation through structural adjustment in chapter 5. Other boxes include the pet food market, genetically modified (GM) crops, land grabs, the financialisation of food, African bean sauces, child obesity in Mexico, and the nineteenth century Irish famine.

The chapters are difficult to summarise as they are so wide-ranging, though coherent and logically connected. Chapter 1, Introduction: Food, Politics and Power, sets out the basic issues around the global food crises of rising prices, hunger and malnutrition, obesity, and food security and sovereignty, pointing to a range of debates over such issues as GM crops, corporate control of food and the role of policy. This chapter establishes that food must be examined within a framework that acknowledges the power relations which shape production and consumption. Chapter 2, The Contemporary Nature and Geography of Malnutrition, examines the facts of both over- and mal-nutrition within the global North and South, foreshadowing the more detailed discussions of Malthusian and alternative perspectives on the relationships between populations and food in Chapter 3, Theoretical Perspectives: Understanding the Patterns. Chapter 4 discusses globalisation and development and situates these processes within their post-WWII contexts. Colonisation and its aftermath is examined in Chapter 5, as well as theories of development. Chapter 6, Sub-national Perspectives, focuses on regional and intra-regional differences in nutrition, taking into account categories such as caste and indigeneity. Chapter 7, Gender and Nutrition: The Female Case focuses specifically on gender as an explanation of inter-personal differences in entitlements. Chapter 8, Conflict and Hunger, explains the ways in which conflict within developing countries lead to hunger, and the history and politics of food aid.

The book concludes with Chapter 9, *Alternative Visions*, which surveys a range of corporate and non-corporate food provisioning systems and stresses the role of power in explaining and challenging global food systems.

Although I would definitely use this book as the major text in a course on food within my (political economy) department, as it is the closest fit to such a course that I've seen, I have an issue with the length and coverage of the chapters, of which there are only nine, a small number for a textbook. The chapters reflect the geography background of the author. For example, Chapter 5, *National Perspectives*, examines the legacies of colonialism (land ownership, labour regimes and the plantation system of agriculture, amongst others); theories and practices of development since WWII; the relationships between neoliberalism and nutrition in the developing and developed countries; and national responses to malnutrition. I would prefer more chapters and chapters focused around issues rather than geographical boundaries, which would make the book much easier to use within the usual 12 or 13 week semester of two-hour, topic-focused lectures. Chapter 5, for example, could be broken down into a chapter on colonial legacies, with very specific case studies, and a chapter on theories and practices of development and their relationships with food. I would also have liked chapters on the sources and impacts of a carnivorous diet, climate change, and post-development perspectives. Minor quibbles, really, and obviously based on my disciplinary focus. In any case workarounds are available: overall, the book is very highly recommended.