Lenore Manderson, ed., ***Shared Wealth and Symbol: Food, Culture, and Society in Oceania and Southeast Asia.*** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Pp. 314, illustrated. $42.50 cloth.

Reviewed by Miriam Kahn, University of Washington

Shared Wealth and Symbol is a collection of articles whose common concern is food. The book is monumental in geographical scope (covering Australia, Oceania, and Southeast Asia) and diverse in methodological and theoretical approaches (dealing with ecology, politics, symbolism, development, and more). The contributions are generally of extremely high quality, rich in ethnographic detail, and well written. The topic, however-food in various regions of the world and in every imaginable context-is overly ambitious. Indeed, the volume's lack of focus, a weakness common among edited volumes, is its downfall.

The introduction does little to provide the reader with a sense of unity and direction. Because, as the editor warns, each paper "explores a particular area of inquiry" (or, in other words, does not speak to a common theme, or even to other articles within the volume), the introduction does not relate the articles to one another. Instead, in keeping with the

volume's ambition and comprehensiveness, Manderson presents an astonishingly well-researched overview of the literature on food-or, rather, on the numerous symbolic uses to which food is put. As we read on, though, we see that despite its title and its introductory remarks, the volume is not simply about food symbolism. Manderson also informs the reader that "because of its essentiality," food is both a biological necessity and a symbol for communication. And, indeed, the chapters approach food from both of these angles and from others as well.

In an attempt to organize the volume, Manderson has divided it into four sections. These are: (1) the ecological, economic, social and political contexts of diet, all of which influence food systems and dietary choices; (2) the cognitive and ideational aspects of food, hunger, and eating; (3) infant feeding practices, as well as changes in these practices due to the intervention of multinational corporations and government agencies that promote bottle feeding; and (4) methodological issues raised in food research and suggestions for nutritional anthropologists in conducting future research.

Since the lack of a theme prevents me from discussing the individual articles in terms of their contribution to the volume as a whole, and since a review of all thirteen chapters would become unnecessarily tedious and diffuse, I have chosen to discuss and review only a select few. I have selected those articles that seemed most valuable and compelling, making an effort to include papers that represent each of the volume's four sections as well as the various geographical regions and theoretical interests.

The first article, by David Hyndman, on the subsistence system of the Wopkaimin of the Highland fringe of Papua New Guinea, is a commendable model of rigorous methodological principles and sensible presentation of techniques when dealing with ecological data. Hyndman analyzes the flow of energy among the Wopkaimin in their practices of shifting cultivation, silviculture, gathering, pig raising, hunting, and fishing. Throughout, he spells out the details of his methodology, alerts the reader to possible weaknesses in his data, and presents his results within a comparative framework. His statistics support facts about New Guinea Highlanders' diets and nutritional levels that are generally known, but not always so well documented as in this article. For example, we learn that more than 90 percent of the bulk of the Wopkaimin diet is provided by plant food-getting activities. Yet 95 percent of the fat and nearly 45 percent of the protein are supplied from animal food-getting activities (p. 44). His conclusions demonstrate the dietary adequacy and the ecological efficiency of Wopkaimin traditional subsistence sys-

terns. His article would have been still more effective had he placed his discussion within a more theoretical framework, or even within the context of the ongoing debate about the adequacy/inadequacy of traditional Highland New Guinea diets.

Thomas Fitzgerald's contribution on dietary change among Cook Islanders who have migrated to New Zealand is also appealing. He examines sixty-two households of Cook Islanders in New Zealand, thirty-one from an inner-city community and thirty-one from a suburban residential neighborhood. Fitzgerald, like Hyndman, begins by fully explaining his research methods. He then examines various aspects of the migrants' patterns of consumption, such as the oscillation between periods of "feast" and "famine," the prevalence of snacking, the maintenance of subsistence gardens, and the preference for New Zealand-style meals with island touches. His discussion of health is of particular interest. Obesity (as opposed to coronary artery disease, hypertension, gout, diabetes, and liver disease, all of which are threateningly on the rise) is the only problem Islanders view as being related to diet. Obesity, however, is not seen as a health problem by Islanders, who view food as something to enjoy and to manipulate socially, but not as a source of nutrients. Fitzgerald also presents insightful descriptions of how Cook Islanders imagine the eating habits of Europeans and on the misconceptions of professional health care workers about Islanders' food habits. With its emphasis on the difference between documented reality and outsiders' misguided perceptions of it, his article offers significant practical applications. First of all, several stereotypes (for example, that Islanders have problems adapting to New Zealand foods, that their children go to school without breakfast, that they know little about maintaining gardens, or that they avoid eating vegetables) are shown to have no basis in fact. Moreover, observations are made in the areas of meal scheduling, snacking patterns, food exchanges, and attitudes toward the relationship between diet and health that could be put to productive use when teaching Islanders about health issues. Fitzgerald suggests that once New Zealanders become more familiar with island customs, reliable information about food values could be presented to Islanders in a clear educational format. He sees this task as the real challenge for health care workers and as the basis for future success in medical care.

In the section on cognitive aspects of food, Michael Young's paper stands out as the most significant contribution. In a well-written, perceptive, and discursive account, Young presents the ideology of hunger in Kalauna, on Goodenough Island in Papua New Guinea. Appetite, he

observes, is almost universally understood as being cultural, yet hunger is consistently treated as physiological. Here he challenges previously held viewpoints and examines hunger as a construct equally rooted in cultural beliefs. Exploring the parameters of the cultural definition of hunger in Kalauna, he tells us that there hunger is experienced in the belly with heightened anxiety, objectified as a sorcery-inflicted disease, and perceived as a threat to the community (p. 113). Just as food can be interpreted and manipulated as a symbolic expression of kinship and community, a lack of food, or what is experienced as such, may represent social disintegration and the collapse of moral values. Young develops this contrast between food and its absence further in a symbolic analysis of notions of stillness (in times of satiety and social cohesion) and wandering (in times of hunger and social disintegration),

Only in a section about food and diet, when Young says that Kalauna food is "bland, bulky, and . . . deadly monotonous" (p. 115) and that "Kalauna people appear to be indifferent cooks" (p. 115), does his sensitivity seem to vanish. True, the Kalauna cooking style may not be to his, or to most Westerners', liking, but why be judgmental in an article that otherwise argues for the value of cultural interpretations? Perhaps the quality of cooking and the degree of importance ascribed to it should be measured in terms of amounts of magic, not spicy ingredients, added. If, as Young tells us, food is a vehicle for magic, then its sameness might serve to inhibit suspicion. In sum, if food and hunger are cultural constructs, then why not taste as well?

The chapters in the section on infant-feeding practices are of especially high quality. Two articles are of particular interest when read together because they present different sides of the breast-bottle controversy (although, astonishingly, neither article refers to the other). These are the chapters by Marianne Spiegel, who writes a balanced and cautious article arguing for an understanding of the complexity of the issues, and Kathy Robinson, who presents an extremely convincing polemic about the deleterious effects of what she consistently refers to as "artificial feeding practices."

Spiegel examines the breast-bottle controversy in Malaysia in such an exhaustive manner that the reader feels thoroughly grounded in the complexities of the issues and, consequently, capable of making an informed judgment. Spiegel first presents the pro-breast argument, discussing such issues as the biological advantage of breast milk in providing immunological protection and in shielding infants from the dangers of infection transmitted by polluted water, contaminated bottles, and lack of refrigeration. She also draws attention to the economic and con-

traceptive benefits of breast-feeding, as well as to the generally greater convenience of the practice. Lacking from her presentation on the virtues of breast-feeding is a fuller discussion of its psychological benefit to mother and infant. Later, in taking a pro-bottle stance, she recounts Nestle's position, which emphasizes the need for early supplementation and the promotion of mixed feeding. Throughout, Spiegel lets the reader know that there are no simple answers. Malnutrition is not caused by bottle feeding alone, but by complex interactions between social groups and government policies. She suggests that testable hypotheses can only be formulated from contextual domestic group research. As she states in her conclusions, she is not so naive as to view multinationals as "deliberate agents of individual socioeconomic enhancement" (p. 190), nor does she see the pro-breast faction as interested only in the welfare of individuals. Indeed, she finds it alarming that in all of the recent heated discussions relatively little attention has been paid to women's rights, roles, and feelings, and that current Western ideology and cultural categories are used to examine conditions in Third World countries. Her point is well taken, and causes one to pause and reflect on her final observation that "whereas milk industry motives are relatively transparent, those of pro-breast coalitions are puzzling" (p. 190).

Should we still be unclear on the "relatively transparent" motives of milk industries, Robinson's article provides excellent documentation and discussion of one such capitalist enterprise. Her anti-bottle stance is emphatic. She first outlines the process of milk industries' encroachment on the Third World. As families in wealthy nations began to shrink in size, and as more Western women turned to breast-feeding as a healthier, more natural way to nourish their babies, milk companies looked to Third World nations as a way to save their declining industry. In this context of general capitalistic expansion, Robinson examines the activities of the Australian Dairy Corporation (ADC) in detail. When its business was faltering in the 1960s and 197Os, with the final blow being the loss of its largest single dairy export market, the United Kingdom, the ADC turned to Asia. It bought up Asia Dairy Industry, which promoted sweetened condensed milk as a substitute for breast milk. In a later section, Robinson looks at the history of the operations of one ADC joint venture plant, P. T. Indomilk, and examines the effects of its activities on the host country. The most serious criticism of P. T. Indomilk derives not from the nature of the investment (the employment of local people, etc.) but from the quality of the product itself, the consequences of its extensive use, and its misrepresentation in advertisements. Robinson supports her position with references to data collected

during a two-year period of fieldwork in a Javanese mining community. There, sweetened condensed milk turned out to be no more than an expensive form of sugar that was not only unsuitable as a milk substitute for babies, but was capable of causing blindness from vitamin A deficiency.

Viewing Robinson's article as a rebuttal to Spiegel's (or vice versa), one is struck by a major aspect of the issue that Spiegel, in all her thoroughness, fails to address adequately-namely, the manipulative promotion of foreign products. According to Robinson, it is not necessarily the product itself that is bad, but the way in which it is promoted and falsely represented. Sweetened condensed milk, when used in appropriate amounts and contexts, may be an excellent dietary supplement. Its promotion as a substitute for breast milk, however, is dishonest, commercially motivated, and dangerous. According to Robinson, the declining and economically unsound milk industry is, in essence, propped up "at the expense of the health-even the lives-of Southeast Asian babies" (p. 234).

The last section of *Shared Wealth and Symbol,* called "Research Method and Direction," is an assortment of loose strands and, as such, is the least successful part of the book. The final article, by Graham Pyke, is the most noteworthy in its provocative argument for an understanding of the genetic basis of food behavior. Pyke, a biologist whose research is on the feeding ecology of nonhuman animals, believes that "there should also, of course, be genetic underpinnings of the cultural interactions. At some level, the responses to observation and symbolic communication *must* be genetically programmed" (p. 275). Pyke's contribution is of interest primarily because he tackles, head-on, a controversial aspect of the food issue- namely, biology versus culture. In his analysis, he applies conclusions from work done on animals to the human animal. For example, research has demonstrated that all animals' dietary choices are influenced by food properties such as color, taste, and odor, by an individual's state of health, by hunger and nutritional deficiencies, and by social interaction with other individuals. The physical environment also exerts an influence. Pyke notes the lack of sufficient studies on dietary choices and how such choices are made. He gives two reasons for exploring the genetic components of dietary choices. First, human beings should, especially in the face of increasing exposure to artificial foods, understand their innate abilities to choose a nutritionally balanced diet. Second, it is important to have an understanding of genetically based constraints on peoples' food-related behavior.

With Pyke's article, curiously and precariously placed at the conclusion of the volume, *Shared Wealth and Symbol* has pivoted 180 degrees from the direction established in the introduction, where Manderson elaborates on all the ways in which food behavior is cultural, not biological. After finishing the volume, the reader is left feeling sated and inspired, but somewhat confused. Why were the ingredients assembled with such a seeming lack of design? Should the volume not have focused on *either* the biological or the symbolic? Or, if the biological/symbolic basis of food issues were truly to be tackled, could the focus not have been the controversy about genetic versus cultural factors involved in food behavior and food choices? When we first open the book, we read that food is noteworthy for two reasons: "food is important simply to sustain biological life. However, because of its essentiality, food largely-features as the matter and symbol of social life" (p. 1). Undoubtedly, the editor is still trying to address all aspects of her subject, as are the various authors with their contributions on the ecological, economic, health-related, social, political, ideological, and methodological aspects of food and food research. As individual articles, the contributions are mostly excellent. As a unified collection bound between two covers, however, *Shared Wealth and Symbol* is unsuccessful. This lack of focus is especially disappointing in an area such as food, where there are so many theoretical avenues from which to choose and so many qualified researchers willing to offer contributions.