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# 7 The Yuck Factor

## Reiterating Insect-Eating (and Otherness) Through Disgust

*Heidi Kosonen*

In Bong Joon Ho's 2013 apocalyptic science fiction film *Snowpiercer*, the revelation that the "third class" citizens are fed ground insects as food paints a visceral metaphor of the class society. Making their way through the circumnavigational train housing the last remnants of humanity, conveniently segregated into separate cars by armed forces, the rebels from the train's "tail" learn that their sustenance consists of cockroaches ground into jelly. Thus their daily protein bar, rendered inedible and disgusting by the climactic revelation of what it is made of, works as a striking criticism of the oppression and dehumanization of the lower classes. Then, imagine willingly eating mealworm spaghetti or a protein bar made of ground grasshoppers, eating "bugs" allegedly so repulsive to a normal human being. No wonder that in 2018 Prince Charles's shocked expression made tabloid covers as his royal highness was offered "green ants on barramundi" (O'Connor 2018). This re-imagined version of the British national dish, fish and chips, was presented in one of the globally popular competitive cooking game show franchise *Masterchef Australia*'s invention test challenges.

Entomophagy, the practice of eating insects, has increasingly been proposed by scholars as a solution to the environmental crisis as a substitute to other meat-eating, recognized as a threat to climate (e.g. van Huis et al. 2013). As a result, crickets, larvae, and other insects have been turned into appetizing snacks in the Western world, which has long gazed upon insect-eating with disgust. In the spectacle-seeking frames of reality television (Gordon 2006), shock reactions similar to Prince Charles's, purveyed to viewers in close-ups, have historically been connected to insects served as food. Now a change is taking place in the news media and popular cultural discourses related to insect-eating. Scholarship reflects this move, predicting new food markets and seeking ways to alleviate the revulsion against entomophagy among Western consumers.

In this chapter, representing critical cultural studies and visual studies, I consider entomophagy's media portrayals by employing discourse analysis, semiology, and visual analysis methods. I conduct a qualitative analysis of the textual and visual elements in selected media portrayals of entomophagy. The focus is on Anglophone media iterations between 2013–2020, discovered online through Google searches Spring 2019 and Spring 2021.[1] I am particularly interested in disgust's role in mediating entomophagy to mass audiences. Through theories of this visceral emotion, I discuss the main ways historical Western representations of revulsion against insects and insect-eating resurface despite the food industry's attempts at presenting entomophagy as appetizing. The theoretical backbone of my analysis lies in the paradigm

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of socio-cultural construction, which explores how cultural discourses and representations shape emotions, conceptions, and norms (e.g. Ahmed 2004; Butler 2004; Hall 2013) – including thoughts related to what is disgusting. My take on entomophagy is here affected by anthropological and post-colonial perspectives on food and foodways, which render poignant not only disgusting foods' socio-cultural construction but also their socio-cultural and moral functions in drawing boundaries and distinctions between groups of people.

Considering food origins and production chains (Curtin and Heldke 1992, 17) and the livability (Haraway 2008) of insects and animals, some scholars have also noted how the moral questions related to farming living creatures for food have been forgotten in the rush to introduce entomophagy as a more ethical and sustainable practice in a food market marked by overconsumption (e.g. Santaoja and Niva 2018). This beckons me to discuss disgust's purported moral role and its constructed nature in my concluding section.

## Foodways in Transit: Entomophagy in the Bizarre Food Market

As entomologist Richard Vane-Wright notes (1991, 1), western Euro-American cultures are unique in that they do not use insects as food, unlike so many cultures across the world. While the argument is partially faulty – the Western cultures are far from unique in their food taboo against insect-eating – it is true that juxtaposed with the Euro-Americans, a noticeable wealth of Indigenous peoples and cultures situated in Africa, the Americas and Asia use insects as food. More than 2100 insect species, from larvae to worms, Orthoptera (grasshoppers, locusts, and crickets), ants and termites, to dragonflies and wasps are consumed (Halloran et al. 2018; Vane-Wright 1991). Furthermore, insects' position as highly prized delicacies in these continents (e.g. Gordon 2006, 356) counters views that render insect-eating a mere survivalist strategy or habit caused by food scarcity (van Huis et al. 2013, ix): against the Western presumptions, insects are not eaten just because "better food" is unavailable.

Vane-Wright's commentary participates in one of the earlier waves of trying to introduce insects as alternative protein in the West. These attempts date back to 1885 to Vincent M. Holt's *Why Not Eat Insects?*, a manifesto in which the British entomologist seeks to alleviate the "long-existing and deep-rooted public prejudice" (5) against insect-eating. Yet, by the end of 2010's attempts to introduce entomophagy as a veritable option had not seen the disappearance of Western prejudices but rather entomophagy's frequent reduction into a "titillating spectacle . . . transgressing boundaries to provide entertainment" (Gordon 2007, 51).

After 2013,[2] varied insect species have been introduced to Western diets with renewed strength: with a growing industry and prolific scholarship looking for solutions to the population growth, food scarcity, lack of farmland, and the environmental crisis from entomophagy, conjoined with changing legislature helping to bring a wide variety of insect-products to the food markets.[3] These discourses introduce insect protein as a healthy, economical, and both ecologically and ethically sustainable alternative to cattle farming, which demands a lot of land and burdens the environment through carbon dioxide emissions and water wastage (van Huis et al. 2013). In Finland, I have followed how several options featuring crickets, from chocolate bars to granola, quickly made their way to advertisements and local supermarkets as exotic, protein-rich additions to the more regular diet. By 2021, the trend appeared

to have died out without catching fire, reiterating entomologist Adena Why's fear of entomophagy getting stuck in a so-called "bizarre food movement" of one-time tries of foods sold mostly because of their shock factor (Bryce 2014), and environmental social scientist Minna Santaoja's accusation that insect food markets are driven by "curiosity culinarism" presenting insects as exciting treats valuable for their newness and exoticism (cited in Jämsen 2017).

Both public prejudice (Holt 1885) and entomophagy's representational history (Gordon 2006) appear to doom insect-eating to being relegated to bizarre foods and curiosity culinarism. Itemizing insect-eating's history as a spectacle-seeking element in game shows, like global franchises *Fear Factor* (first aired 2001) or *Survivor* (first aired 2000), Gordon describes:

> Bugs have become a Reality TV staple, a commonplace in "docu-stunt" and "docu-real" television. Bee swarms, scorpion pits, pizza with grub worms and coagulated blood, cockroaches passed between couples' mouths, clear plastic coffins full of giant Madagascar hissing cockroaches, live dragonflies, roach blender drinks, worm wine, and worm sausage, and a cricket eating contest have all appeared much to the disgust and titillation of the TV spectator conditioned to seeing playful and transgressive eating in reality and culinary television.
>
> (2007, 52)

In such representations, insect-eating is usually introduced through playful and sensational discourses (Gordon 2006, 353). While both employ the unthinkability of insects as food, the latter seeks to arouse horror and disgust in viewers (358), often achieved through breaking Western food taboos and presenting insects as horrifying masses of "creepy crawlies" (Brown 2006; see also Hoyt and Schultz 1999 (eds.)). Exemplifying insect-eating's cultural position as a spectacle has included nudges at consumers' daring, as in the following ice cream advertisement: "Salt & Straw's latest flavors . . . may not be for even the most adventurous of eaters. That's because they have actual blood and real meal worms [sic] in them" (Chayes Wida 2018).

## Disgust: A Danger Reaction and a Constructed Emotion

As has been noted in marketing studies, one of the most vital factors hindering the consumption of insect-based food items is the disgust related to insects as food (Heinä 2020, 78; see also Halloran et al. 2018). Disgust might be the most visceral of basic human emotions because it has been associated with human defense mechanisms (e.g. Curtis 2013) and the so-called lower senses: smell, taste, and touch (Korsmeyer 1999, 11–37). As a biological danger reaction disgust may protect organisms from threats to their existence, such as spoilt food or poisonous animals (e.g. Oaten et al. 2009) or infectious diseases (Curtis 2013). However, in the humanities and social sciences, disgust has been connected to varied kinds of symbolic differentiations between "self" and "the world", "us" and "the others." In the psychoanalytic framework, Julia Kristeva (1982) sees disgust instrumentalized in the creation and maintenance of a separate self. Similarly in social sciences, several scholars study disgust's use in the construction and preservation of the ways societies, nation-states, and cultures are ordered and hierarchized (e.g. Miller 1997; Nussbaum 2017). As "brazenly and uncompromisingly judgmental (Kahan 1998, 1624)" emotion, disgust also serves

moral functions in several cultures and their legislative systems (Kolnai 2004; Nussbaum 2006). In these social functions, disgust connects to threats to the organism and gets its power from bodily defenses against death and disease but is also constructed separately from them as a cultural, hierarchizing, and highly symbolic emotion.

There are various reasons why insects cause disgust in humans or Westerners in particular. In his pioneering work on this emotion, philosopher Aurel Kolnai lists physical qualities that can be related to insects and the disgust they evoke: undesirable proximity; association to disease, death, and decay; 'viscous' or slimy appearance; excessive fertility; and swarming (2004, 52–62). He enumerates:

> Their crawling stickiness; their appearance of being as it were 'pasted over' their substrate . . . ; their pullulating squirming, their cohesion into a homogenous teeming mass; their evocation of decomposition and decay.
>
> (57)

Similar qualities are included also in social philosopher William Ian Miller's cognitive binaries for making sense of disgust (1997, 38–58). Those connectable to insects include plenitude (one vs. many) and movement (still vs. wiggly); in his understanding, insects are disgusting especially in "their teeming nocturnal multitudes" (44). Especially the connection between pests and contagious diseases (health vs. disease) and entomophagy's perceived primitivity (us vs. them) (38) can help explain why insects precisely as sources of protein invoke several food taboos in the west. Insects also easily appear as monstrous (beauty vs. ugliness) (38) in their "invertebrate shape" (Kellert 1993, 57–58) so far removed from the anthropomorphic considerations of beauty.

Yet like other "disgust-objects," the aversion related to insects and their consumption as food cannot be understood without paying attention to their cultural representation next to their "observable" physical qualities. For instance, their "teeming multitudes" mentioned both by Kolnai and Miller invoke insects' threatening excessive proliferation as monstrous and feminized "egg-laying machines" (Sleigh 2007, 290), "feed[ing] into the most insidious anxieties about unnatural copulation and births" (Braidotti 2002, 158; see also Grosz 1995, 187–205). Insects' exclusion from the Western diet especially reflects their position in cultural categories through which they have been associated with dirt, disease, and death. Nicky Coutts discusses insects' enduring association to death and decomposition, forged in medieval discourses where the discovery of carrion insects threatened the human material body, the temple of the soul: "Insects in their seemingly infinite varieties of form were witnessed writhing, teeming and feasting on decaying human remains, threatening not only the external but also the eternal wholeness and integrity of the human body" (2007, 32). Charlotte Sleigh maintains that the negative image of insects also has roots in a strategic early-twentieth-century attempt to establish entomology as a serious discipline through insects' connection to crop damage and infectious human diseases, like malaria or typhoid (2007, 282). All these associations speak of a long Western history of representing insects as dangerous, disgusting, contagious, avoidable, and Other.

Despite the effective circulation of these productive, macabre, and cryptid associations and imageries, the aversion towards entomophagy rests also on insects' symbolic utility in representing otherness and in their instrumentality in the differentiations between groups of people. Cultural scholar Jay Mechling, for instance, studies the

cockroach as a powerful symbol that "nicely condenses into one symbol a great many social and psychological anxieties, some of which are human but most of which may be characteristically (if not uniquely) American" (Mechling 1991, 122). In this line, Braidotti (2002, 148–171), Sara Ahmed (2004), and Christopher Hollingsworth (2007) recount insects' metaphorical instrumentality in patriarchal, racist, and xenophobic Western discourses seeking to dehumanize certain groups of people to justify their oppression, deportation, or even genocide.

Since insects are so symbolically laden in themselves and as food, environmental health expert Val Curtis emphasizes the processes of naming and representing insect-based products in attempts to present them as appetizing food to consumers (cited in McCoy 2019). Curtis reminds the readers that unlike elsewhere in the world, the terminology used in the West fails to distinguish between edible insects and pests and proposes: "If you're going to market insects, you take them as far away from anything slimy or crawling or creepy or too leggy" (ibid.). For insects' too leggy, winged, and alien look Curtis also discourages using images of insects on food packages and in advertisements (ibid.), in similar chains of displacement with which a distinction between slaughtered animals and sanitized "meat" has been achieved (e.g. Adams 1991). In a 2018 empirical study, Sebastian Berger et al also argue that emphasizing the pleasures, luxuriousness, exotism, and trendiness of entomophagy appeal to consumers better than highlighting their purported health or environmental benefits (2018). In his pioneering essay, Holt proposes that making entomophagy an accepted practice would require positive examples by the prevailing social elite (1885, 29), which is hardly met with Prince Charles cringing at edible ants.

In the following sections, I focus on disgust's role in representing entomophagy in Western mainstream media during the latest, post-2013 trend of introducing insect foods, businesses, and markets to consumers. I draw up exemplary case studies from news media and discuss the ways disgust governs the way the phenomenon has been represented.

## The "Yuck" Factor: Insect Foods in Media

The frames and illustration images in news media, gathered based on Google searches of news items published between 2013–2020, reveal that the attitudes related to insect-eating are heavily in flux. On the surface, they appear to aspire to matter-of-fact depictions and might achieve this when the textual elements are considered. In news articles, neutral frames related to industry and small businesses involved in insect products and entomophagy have in part replaced the sensational frames studied by Gordon a decade earlier. For instance, the articles deal with the environmental or health benefits related to entomophagy or the increased production of insect-based foods and their marketing. However, the yuck-factor pertinent to reality-TV remains especially in the visual and terminological choices through which entomophagy is reported. For instance, in two articles published by *CNN Health*, edible insects are termed "maggots" and "bugs", blurring the differentiation between edible insects and pests ("To feed the world, begin with maggot sausage and insect ice cream, scientist says", 2 May 2019; "The food that can feed, and maybe save, the planet: Bugs", 25 October 2019). These frequently reiterated terms, reminiscent of cadavers and ruined crops, reference insects' disgusting origins in death and infectious diseases. A playful tone, remarked by Gordon (2006), is often evident in the terminological play in the titles.

The illustrations for the news articles, often made available to the press by image depositories like Shutterstock, are more blatantly spectacle-oriented than the texts. Even matter-of-fact news can be adjoined by revolting images of insects and entomophagy. The "bugs" (most often crickets or mealworms) are featured in plenty: as a mass of cooked or raw insects that could be either dead or alive, and easy to imagine in movement. Considering that both plenitude (mass, many) and movement (wiggly, swarming) are among the primary observable disgust-features of insects, these types of images connect straight to the "teeming nocturnal multitudes" (Miller 1997, 44) that according to Miller and Kolnai horrify humans in insects. Their teeming continues in some of the headlines and lead paragraphs, which often highlight insects' wiggle in imageries of pan-fried crickets still floundering, or feature mealworms writhing all the way from between the teeth to the pit of the stomach. In a playful tone, *Ozy* for instance recounts the 2013 FAO report (van Huis et al.), which "urges Westerners to open their minds and mouths to the 10 quintillion insects that are buzzing, wriggling and crawling at any given moment" ("Heap some bugs on your plate", 13 February 2014).

In an article by *Undark* ("To Save the Planet, Eat More Bugs?", 10 July 2017) both the visually evoked teeming multitudes and the naming of the edible insects in ways reminiscent of pests are exemplary. Even if the article discusses crickets and mealworms, specifically, in the title they have been categorized in the general category of "bugs", which can also include insects generally perceived as inedible and unsavory, such as cockroaches. In the recipes mentioned in the text, the mealworms have been ground into flour as one component of "meatballs", yet in the illustration, they appear as a gushing heap of uncooked mass of hundreds of mealworms, which have been captured amid movement. Some appear to attempt an escape from the bowl containing them, thus echoing their swarming despite the limitations of still images.

Next to wriggling masses, some articles conjoin texts with images that make a point of eating the insect whole and/or unprepared, countering Val Curtis' notions of (naming and) representing insects in ways that reject their many-legged, crawly, and slimy stereotypes. For instance, out of the 18 illustrations in *CNN Health* ("The food that can feed, and maybe save, the planet: Bugs", 25 October 2019), seven feature insects in masses and six focalize individual insects (cooked or uncooked) with their numerous legs, feelers and antlers sticking out: a water beetle on chopsticks, fried grasshoppers on top of sushi rolls, a grasshopper in a spoon, fried tarantula on the palm of a hand, deep-fried scorpions on a stick. In an article in *The Conversation* ("Review: Bugs on the Menu at the Environmental Film Festival", 5 October 2016) the image displays a mouth held wide open with a chocolate-covered yet intact cricket entering it.

To anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the binary opposition between raw and cooked carries universal symbolic utility in raw food's association with what is "natural", and often dangerous and forbidden. Cooking, in contrast, marks food's (and its referents') transition from "nature" to "culture" (1964, 164) in a process through which it is rendered fit for human consumption. In this regard, the illustrations' frequent tactic to display the "bugs" in their teeming, uncooked state works as a testimony of their inedibility in the Western context, wherein Mary Douglas argues the "creeping, swarming, teeming creatures abominably [to] destroy the taxonomic boundaries" (1975, 269) of food "that divides edible [animals] from inedible" (273). On the other hand, the close-ups of fried yet otherwise unprocessed insects tap into the representational history of insects' monstrous, alien otherness, that has

featured them as nightmarish crawlies in Western entertainment (e.g. Braidotti 2002, 148–171; Freeland 2000; Leskovsky 2006). This is particularly evident in displaying the Orthoptera (e.g. crickets), whose legs and wings are in many cultures considered inedible and removed before eating (e.g. Gahukar 2011), yet which are in the illustration images displayed with all aforementioned "excessive" body parts sticking out.

## The Spectacle of the Other: (In)Edible Bugs and "Primitive Others"

The disgust associated with entomophagy in these frames and illustration images is hardly surprising considering the Western history of taboos and reiterating prejudices that the food industries must battle to present insect products as appetizing. As emphasized by the scholarly investigation of food customs, how and what we eat is often a question of how we identify and affiliate ourselves culturally and as individuals. This process is accomplished in relation to varied food rules, taboos, and symbolic structures (Counihan 1999, 19–20) that are culturally constituted (Douglas 1975; Leach 1979; Levi-Strauss 1964) and culturally maintained (Barthes 1997). Because of the symbolic force of food and foodways, they not only reflect the social group but also marks its borders (Eräsaari and Uusihakala 2016) – both internal and external, perpetually shifting and endangered – in the varied judgments pertaining to the "inedibility" of certain foods (Douglas 1975) or the "disgustingness" of particular foodways (Roth 2005). As Maggie Kilgour thus suggests, food is a "symbolic system used to define personal, national and even sexual differences" (1998, 239), of which both the gendered implications of meat-eating vis-à-vis vegetarianism (Adams 1991; Sobal 2005) and the instrumental position of cannibalism in the colonial politics (Arens 1979; Kilgour 1998), serve as examples.

These theories of food and foodways enforce the idea that from the aesthetic judgments about the edibility and savoriness of particular foods to the dietary choices of individuals, food's consumption – or indeed, representation – cannot be dissociated from the "social body" and its border- and biopolitical mechanisms. These seek to maintain the internal purity of the group through "pure" choices and "proper" consumption and the abjection of others' foods and foodways. Anthropologists Matti Eräsaari and Katja Uusihakala state: "food taboos . . . do not tell us so much about the avoided animal as of the human ways of self-definition as members of particular groups and separating from others through food preferences and aversions" (2016, 14).[4]

In this line of theory, the ideas of disgustingness and inedibility evoked in entomophagy's media illustrations could be argued to play a similar double role of not only marking the insects consumed as disgusting but also sullying the individuals and groups of people consuming them. In the images, this function is evident particularly in images that represent the act of eating insects and often do so through exaggeration. For instance, in the header for the aforementioned article in *The Conversation*, a certain amount of disgust is evoked by the gaping mouth, and through the mouth, associated with the individual about to eat the cricket. The act of consumption is still in the Western world surrounded by cultural taboos and rules of propriety, against which the represented gaping mouth – one of the guarded orifices to the human body – transgresses. Researchers from different fields recount that too loud eating, chewing with mouth open or indeed just the "sight of other bodies eating" (Probyn 2000, 7) can evoke moral or class-related (Miller 1997, 242), or even phobic disgust reactions (Kumar et al. 2017).

Gordon repeats the oft-cited saying "you are what you eat"[5] and proposes insect-eating to register as a transgression against social norms more easily than most foodways: "Entomophagy, more so than consumption of other foods, can serve to embody social transgression, symbolic taboo, or even spiritual sin" (2007, 52). These notions connect to affect scholar Sara Ahmed's recognition of emotions' (including disgust's) "stickiness," wherein contact (or association through mere likeness) with the disgust-object alone is enough to make something or someone disgusting: "An object becomes disgusting through its contact with other objects that have already, as it were, been designated as disgusting before the encounter has taken place" (2004, 87; also Miller 1997, 5). In this sense the images, making an exaggerated spectacle of the act of eating insects, or of eating them obnoxiously, are on the brink of serving a warning "you are as disgusting as the insect you eat." Similar images to *The Conversation* headline are featured for instance in the article images of *Youmatter* ("Will We Start Eating Bugs? Are Insects More Sustainable Than Meat?" 17 January 2020) and *Medical News Today* ("Grub's up! How eating insects could benefit health", 22 June 2016). Some of these – widely common – article images even feature a recognizable disgust face (Rozin, Lowery, and Ebert 1994), as in the *Multibriefs* article ("Eating insects could help save the planet", 16 August 2019) in which a white Caucasian man is eating a scorpion.

In discussing entomophagy, in particular, Vane-Wright proposes that "the very fact that eating insects belongs to the hunter-gatherer stage of human evolution may be a major factor in their rejection by Western people: we may unconsciously reject entomophagy as primitive" (1991, 2). But he fails to mention the ways the idea related to the primitivity of insect-eating has reflected the power relations between Global North and South, and how so-called "primitive" foodways like entomophagy have been instrumentalized in the colonial differentiations between civilization and primitivism, development and regression, and hygiene and filth. As anthropologist Julie Lesnik notes, the history of eating insects in the West is "stained by the colonial exploitation of native peoples" (2019, 560). She argues that the disgust response to eating insects has been taught to Europeans and Colonial Americans through narratives of the foodways of the colonized "primitives." She writes: "Although these tales of how only beast-like people would eat insects are exaggerated and/or fabricated, they became very real in Europe's collective memory." (564). Similarly, Grabowski and colleagues note the origination of a certain portion of the current food legislation from colonial times and suggest that "the omission of edible insects . . . may be part of the entomophobia of the colonial rulers" (2020). This is reflected also in the comment by Vane-Wright: the "civilization" of the Euro-Americans is suspended on their perceived (but imaginary) uniqueness of *not* eating insects *like* the peoples they colonized. Of course, as Holt reminds the readers, entomophagy has a history in the colonizers' past too, including Greek and Roman foodways (1885, 47).

While the "colonial others" themselves are not featured in the illustrations, it is rare that a news article would fail to mention – like Vane-Wright – how *unusual* the Western food customs are in not including insects, or how abundant the countries seen as less developed are in their variety of *exotic* insect delicacies and entomophagous foodways. There is a strain of othering in the articles' insistence in framing entomophagy as a third-world custom while it is marketed to Western consumers as a bizarre novelty and an ecological yet slightly disgusting act. Seen in relation to foodways' and taboos' (Kosonen 2020) role in drawing distinctions between self and others, in

subtle ways the verbal and visual choices of the articles participate in the othering discourses, where entomophagy, among other purportedly "disgusting" foodways, has been utilized in differentiating between the (developed) Euro-American countries and the (primitive) Global South. And in some instances, the "curiosity culinarism" and entomophagous spectacle even sell insect products with entomophagy's primitive image and the otherness of those who eat insects. For example, in the advertisements for a product called "Larvets" by an online store specialized in "curiously awesome gifts" (*Vat19*), insects are eaten by lizards and hillbillies with bad teeth, reiterating conceptions of the animality that grounds insect-eating's primitive image and the cultural evolutionary distinctions of the colonial project.

These representations' relationship to colonial differentiations is more evident when they are set in the continuum with the reality TV spectacle discussed by Gordon that, along with the entire history of discourses and representations on entomophagy, still informs our relationships to insect-eating. For instance, early twentieth-century backpacker adventure realities, like *Madventures* (first aired 2002) or *Man vs. Wild* (first aired 2006), frequently feature encounters with foreign foodways. These shows follow White European Male globetrotters in neo-colonial frames of experiencing the wilderness and the cultures in far-away continents. To take an example of this representative regime, in an episode of Discovery channel's *Man vs. Wild* (season 2; episode 8; aired 2008), adventurer Bear Grylls is visiting Zambia and scavenges "a local delicacy", a giant rhino beetle larva, from a hollow tree trunk. In a similar line with the spectacle Gordon describes, the scene emphasizes the disgustingness of what is eaten to highlight the "daring" it takes: to the white adventurer, eating the local delicacy is a way of highlighting his masculinity and dominance. Despite his disgust – evident in his expression and verbal interjections – Grylls eats the larva with a crunch so that its bodily fluids fly all over. As Grylls himself narrates before taking a bite of the raw and wriggling larva, the local habit is to cook the larvae before consuming them. His decision to eat the larva raw continues to carry the symbolic utility of marking whatever the food attaches to, here the Zambian culture depicted only in its "uncivilized" elements, as primitive (Lévi-Strauss 1964).

## 'Cricket's Crackle:' Disgust from Different Perspectives

From Holt's notions in 1885 to current research seeking to introduce entomophagy to the Western diet, scholars agree that in normalizing entomophagy it is important to pay attention to how insect foods are discussed and represented: as luxury foods removed from associations to their easily revolting origins (e.g. Berger et al. 2018). To a certain extent, a transition from the affective reality TV spectacle Gordon itemizes towards edible food has happened. For instance, over several seasons the mystery box -challenges of the cooking reality game *Masterchef Australia* have seen amateur cooks preparing haute-cuisine dishes from insects based on one of its celebrity chefs' advocacy for entomophagy (PTI 2018). Yet news media lags far behind with their frequent decision to title the edible insects playfully as "bugs" or "maggots", and in their illustrations, join the – more or less neutral – texts with swarming masses of larvae, uncooked crickets with their numerous limbs sticking out, or revolting images of insects' consumption that easily render disgusting also the individuals eating them.

The prejudices these frames reflect are rooted deep in Western food taboos and conceptions of insects. It is dubious if the relationship towards entomophagy can even

be changed within the generation that is witnessing the transition in foodways. After all, as Carolyn Korsmeyer writes in her analysis of taste: "It can be hard to educate both the palate and the digestive system away from disgust and prohibitions that are inculcated early in life" (1999, 93). Especially problematic media's yuck factor and focus on the stereotypes of insect-eating's primitivity could be argued to be when they associate to ideas about otherness. In the mass-mediated global society of today, representations play an important role in shaping ideas of other cultures and peoples. From this perspective entomophagy's revolting representations are not without ethical concerns, especially when considering both foodways and disgust's instrumentality in building social identities (e.g. Eräsaari and Uusihakala 2016) and drawing borders between "us" and our others (e.g. Ahmed 2004; Miller 1997). Dean W. Curtis further argues that food taxonomies, separating edible foods from inedible ones, recognize food as "something made to become part of who we are" (1992, 9). Thus, against the history (and present moment) of Westerners getting horrified at the Global South's insect delicacies and entomophagous customs, the frames, and images encouraging viewers to feel disgusted by the thought of eating insects and by the people consuming them are never innocent.

Perhaps based on this history of insect-eating-related disgust and entomophagy's otherness, the latest turns in discussing its future in the Western world have seen insects as more fit for animal feed than human food (e.g. Halloran et al. 2018). In this context the spectacle of disgust over entomophagy is at its most untamed as the following excerpt from yet another BBC article ("How insects could feed the food industry of tomorrow", 3 June 2014):

> Millions of maggots squirm over blackened pieces of fruit and bloody lumps of fetid flesh. A pungent stench of festering decay hovers over giant vats of writhing, feasting larvae. It's more than enough to put most people off their lunch. Yet these juvenile flies could soon be just one step in the food chain away from your dinner plate.

While recognizing the connection between what one eats and what one is, noted by philosophers from Feuerbach to Brillat-Savarin (1949) and here causing revulsion one food chain away, the article implies that the need to know foods' and feed's origins only applies when insects are in question. For instance, similar questions are not related to humans eating pork, or pig feed that does *not* consist of insects. And of course, there are many ethical dilemmas also in farming insects. In the rush to add insects into the Western diet because "the cruelty we inflict on millions of animals fills many of us with sadness" (PTI 2018), as the insect-eating advocate Gary Mehigan comments, we do not think of the cruelty that humanity will inflict on insects if they are farmed (rather than foraged) for human food or animal feed. Sustainability does not go hand in hand with ethics.

Concerning this, Finnish journalist Elisa Jämsen asks a vital question: "When a cricket crackles between your teeth, do you feel like you are making an ecological decision or a sting in your conscience?" (2017). Here disgust – the unappetizing crackle – is given a function quite different from the disgusting frames studied elsewhere in this chapter, labeling as disgusting lifeforms farthest removed from humans and "exotic others" to the White Western hegemony. Disgust appears in its purported status as "moral" emotion. Like in its status as danger reaction, as moral emotion disgust has

easily been essentialized and severed from its social contexts and processes. Bioethicist Leon Kass (1997), for instance, argues that disgust conveys instinctual knowledge against that which lacks goodness or wisdom. Yet the aforementioned example of the abhorrence over a pig eating insects – not because of the pig's suffering over such "unbecoming" food but because the insects are feared to render the pig itself less tasty to humans – proves the ways the borders and the entities that disgust protects as intrinsically good, wise or pure are culturally constructed. And, as has been witnessed in the designations of entomophagy as disgusting and inherently other, disgust often punches downwards in hierarchies (Miller 1997; Wilson 2002), denying its targets humanity or livable lives (Ahmed 2004). Jämsen's disgust, instead, does not stick to anything, a bug or a human – only to the unappetizing sound – which makes it an interesting starting point in thinking disgust's uses in varied hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses.

## Notes

1. One thing that must be mentioned in studying Anglophone "Western" material is that the so-called West is, in effect, a mélange of varied cultures with quite different histories. This is particularly relevant when a concept as volatile as colonialism comes into the picture.
2. The new wave started with the publication of van Huis et al's FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) report *Edible insects: Future prospects for food and feed security*. Starting in 2014 the numbers of entomophagy-related publications have steadily risen from 1–4 to 65 articles per year, according to the archives of Elsevier's Science Direct (searched 19 January 2021).
3. In many countries, the process is slowed or halted by legislation that prohibits or restricts insects' sale as food, as well as feed for non-human animals, based on their "impure" status (e.g. Mariod 2020).
4. All translations from Finnish to English are my own.
5. Often attributed to French gastronomist Brillat-Savarin (1949). In this form, the anecdote is by German religious scholar Ludwig Feuerbach (Cherno 1963), however.

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